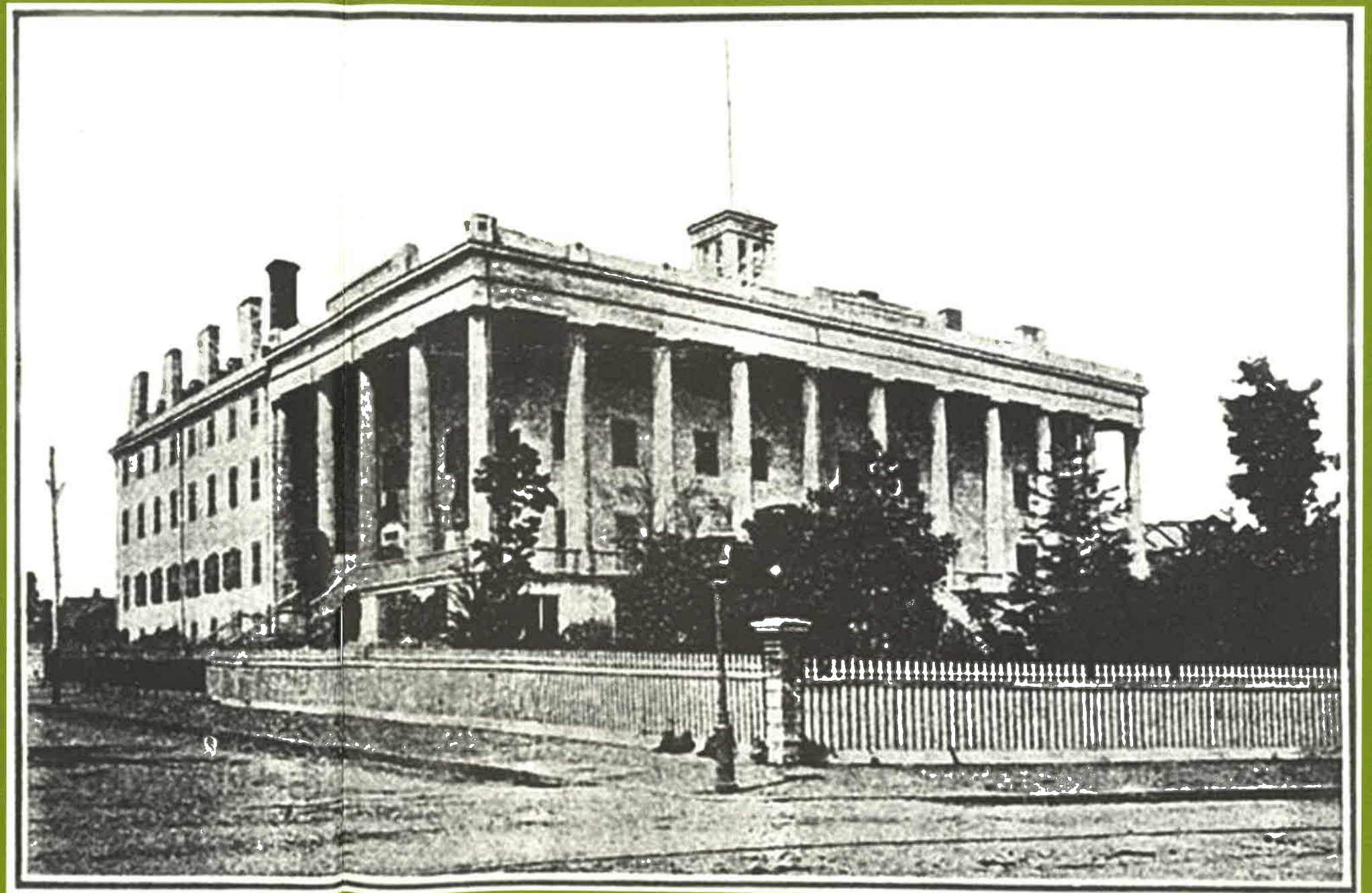
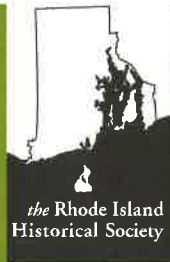


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WINTER/SPRING 2011 VOLUME 69, NUMBER 1



COVER

The Tockwotten House, formerly a residence and hotel, was converted for use as the Providence Reform School, which opened in 1850. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 4498).

Rhode Island History

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This collection of Providence Reform School letters at the Providence City Archives has now been separated into folders labeled by month and year and stored in two acid-free boxes. Photo by Zakk Ennis, June 2007.

The Providence Reform School:

A Missing Part of Rhode Island History

GEORGE BRANIGAN

The Providence Reform School, which opened in 1850, operated for three decades at a facility near the city's India Point waterfront. The only extant history of the school was published in 1902 by James H. Nutting, resident chaplain to the various institutions at the Howard complex in Cranston during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although brief, Nutting's account provides a narrative arc from the school's founding, through an investigation of alleged abusive practices in 1868-69, to the facility's relocation from India Point to sites in Cranston in 1882 after jurisdiction and oversight had been transferred from the Providence City Council and an appointed board of trustees to the State Board of Charities and Corrections. Included in a broader history of state institutions entitled "The Poor, the Defective and the Criminal," Nutting's account contains no references to source materials, and a search of contemporary scholarship might indeed suggest that no such materials exist.¹

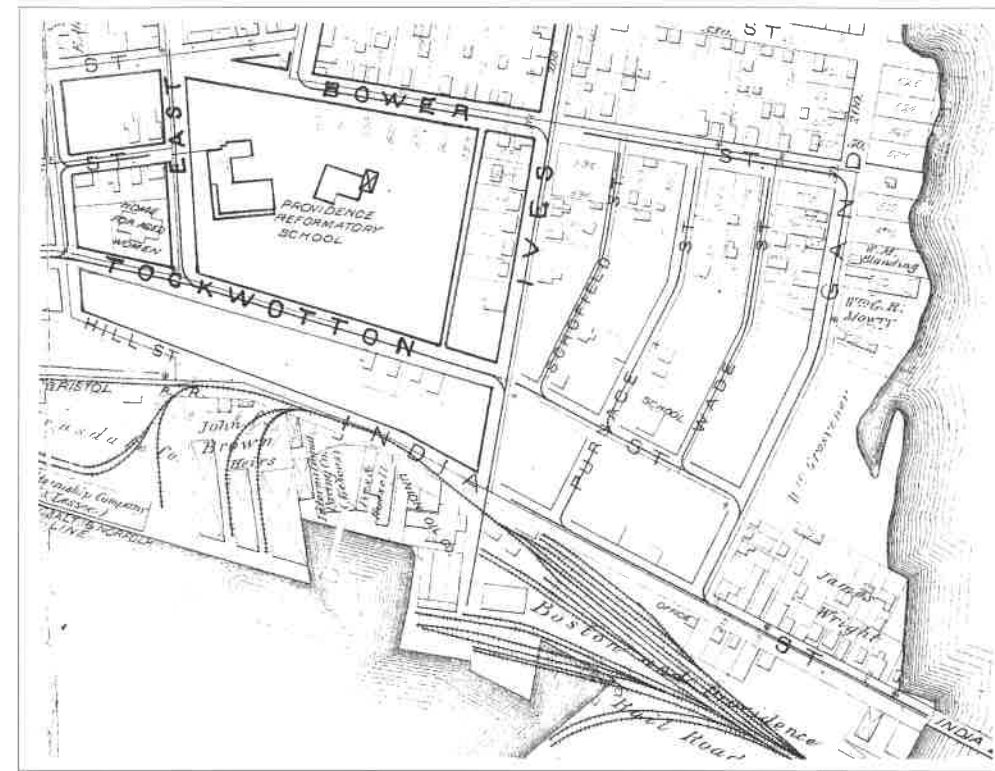
But in fact newly transcribed documents at the Rhode Island Historical Society, the Providence City Archives, the Rhode Island State Archives, and the State Judicial Archives now make it possible to flesh out Nutting's narrative in much greater detail.² An examination of these materials poses a number of questions about the program, the players, and the politics that swirled around one of the leading reform and rescue institutions in the country, an institution that attracted national attention and drew into its local vortex such luminaries as Bishop Francis Patrick McFarland, politicians Charles E. Gorman, Benjamin F. Thurston, and James Y. Smith, and a number of prominent social-minded women, including Elizabeth Buffum Chace and her daughter, Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman.

The transcribed documents are so richly detailed that we know the precise date when Harriet Beecher Stowe, along with her father and sister, visited the institution and addressed the inmates. We know which families were frequently used for indentured placements as part of the recovery program. We know which textbooks were used in the school's four hours of instruction each day and how the "grade plan" of discipline was organized. We know how the inmates celebrated Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July. We know the names of citizens who frequently conducted "spiritual services" midweek and on Sunday and the kind of medical services that were provided by the attending physician, Dr. George L. Collins. We know the identity of the very first inmate and the names of other boys and girls among the 2,725 who were placed in the school over its thirty-year existence at India Point. We can track the subsequent lives of hundreds of the inmates through census records, vital records, divorce records, letters, and return visits to the school; and by cross-referencing the names of former inmates with names on state prison inmate rosters, we can determine the rates of recidivism and recovery. We know which practices the Ladies' Board of Visitors found objectionable or inequitably apportioned between the boys and girls, how the Ladies' Board appealed for redress of its grievances about these practices, and how the school's all-male board of trustees planned its responses. We can reconstruct the circumstances surrounding the 1868-69 investigation into the school's institutional practices and the connection of that investigation to the Irish immigrant community, and we can trace how concerns over ill treatment and harsh discipline were publicized in the Catholic and general press as well as in a short story by Lillie Wyman.

With the documentary materials now available, it is possible to construct an institutional history, a political history, a social history, a criminological history, or an educational history of the school, or an account of individual persons there, both the school's caretakers and its inmates. Interwoven with the records are narrative threads of the Civil War, escape from slavery, economic hardship, and struggles with interpersonal relationships, all resonating against the backdrop of the search for individual power and personal dignity.³

ON NOVEMBER 1, 1850, the Providence Reform School received its first inmate, John H. Galloway, arrested for vagrancy and sentenced to a term of two years.⁴ Prior to the opening of the school, Galloway had served time in the Providence County Jail for theft, along with seventeen other juveniles between the ages of seven and seventeen years old.⁵

The school had been in the planning stages since May 1847—the same year that the first reform school in the United States opened at Westboro, Massachusetts⁶—when the Providence Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers petitioned the Providence City Council to establish a facility for “idle and vicious” youth separate from the adult prisons and jails. In July 1848 the council passed a resolution empowering a committee to locate a site, plan a building, and estimate the costs of an institution similar to the one at Westboro. By end of the year the committee had formulated regulations and bylaws for the school and had employed an architect to renovate the Tockwotton House, a former hotel and residence at India Point overlooking Providence harbor to the south and the Seekonk River to the east, at the site now occupied by the Vartan Gregorian Elementary School. In December 1849 the committee brought



The location of the Providence Reform School is shown in this detail from a map of Providence. *Atlas of the City of Providence and Environs* (Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins, 1882).

its application to establish the reform school before the General Assembly, which granted its approval in January 1850. After six trustees were appointed in May 1850, the city council adopted the act establishing the Providence Reform School, with the provision that the institution was to admit children from across the state, not just those who were Providence residents.⁷

The bylaws adopted by the city council were nearly identical to those which governed the operation of the reform school at Westboro, perhaps indicating a degree of consensus within the child-rescue movement of the mid-nineteenth century over the goals, operational procedures, and population targeted for reform within such facilities. There was, however, one major difference: while the Massachusetts act stipulated that its statutes applied to “boys,” the Reform School Act of Rhode Island used the terms “children” and “persons,” implying that children of both sexes were subject to the regulations.⁸ The decision to include girls as inmates—a move that would keep them out of prisons, jails, workhouses, and state farms with adult

Providence, sc.
 5156. State, vs. John H. Galloway
 Be it Remembered, That on the 31st day of Oct. 1850
 John H. Galloway of Providence hath
 been brought before the Court of Magistrates for the City of Providence by virtue of a Warrant issued
 against him on the 31st day of Oct. 1850 by John H. Chaffee one of the
 Justices of said Court, and one of the Justices of the Peace for said County, on the complaint of
 John H. Chaffee on oath and in writing, in the name and in behalf of the State, setting forth
 that with force and arms at said Providence in said County on the
 31st day of Oct. 1850 John H. Galloway of
 said Providence is a vagrant in this that he is
 an idle person of doubtful reputation sharing
 no visible means of support, lives without em-
 ployment, wandering abroad lodging in watch-
 house out houses and stables on the streets
 against the Statute and the peace and dignity of the State.
 And the said John H. Galloway being thereupon arraigned hath pleaded not guilty, and
 upon examination is adjudged guilty, and is sentenced to
 12 yrs imprisonment in the Reform School or 1 month
 in the County Jail
 and the payment of costs, taxed at 6 dollars and 53 cents,
 and to stand committed until sentence be performed in all its parts.

The charge against John H. Galloway and his sentencing to the Providence Reform School as its first inmate are specified in this court record. Magistrate Court Records, Providence County, vol. 6, Oct. 31, 1850, case no. 5156, Rhode Island Judicial Archives.

Clerk.

populations—was intentional, but it was questioned from the outset. As the school's first superintendent, James Talcott, noted, "The admission of females, which had been considered by some of the Board as a matter not only of doubtful policy in itself, but as probably exceeding their power as Trustees, in a rigid construction of the law, was decided upon after [a] declaratory vote of the General Assembly."⁹

Uncertainty about who was included by the new provisions to rescue children from the influences

of neglect, vagrancy, immorality, and vice did not escape the politically and socially minded women of Providence. As early as February 1851, less than four months after the school opened, a petition was filed with the General Assembly by Mrs. H. R. Anthony and 281 other women requesting that "the act establishing a Reform School in this city be so amended that the *vagrant, vicious and unprotected* young females of our city may be brought under the benign influence of that Institution."¹⁰ With the women's position supported by

Ann E. Finn, charged with vagrancy (left), and Rosanna C. Whitmore (or Whittemore), charged with assaulting a woman identified by census records as her mother (right), were among the first girls sentenced to the

an editorial in the March 12, 1851, *Providence Journal*, the Assembly voted to declare that girls were indeed to be admitted to the school, with no amendment of the Reform School Act necessary: the inclusive language of the act applied to girls as well as boys.

The first two girls were sentenced to the reform school in May 1851; a third was added in November, one year and nineteen days after the school opened.¹¹ In anticipation of accepting female inmates, the east wing of the building was set aside to house them, seven hundred

dollars was appropriated for additional expenses, and the female staff was increased. But the superintendent recognized during that first year that the separate facilities for girls were not going to be equal to those of the boys, and in his first annual report he mentioned the inadequacy of the girls' playground space.¹²

Although the Providence women's concerns were apparently accommodated by the admission of girls and their complete separation from the boys, the issue of parity would never be adequately resolved

reform school. Magistrate Court Records, Providence County, vol. 7, May 19, 1851, case no. 5587; *ibid.*, Nov. 19, 1851, case no. 6185.

Providence, sc.
5587 State, vs. Ann E. Finn May 19 A.D. 1851
Be it Remembered, That on the 19th day of May A.D. 1851
Ann E. Finn of Providence hath
been brought before the Court of Magistrates for the City of Providence, by virtue of a Warrant issued
against her on the 17th day of May by H. R. Anthony one of the
Justices of said Court, and one of the Justices of the Peace for said county, on the complaint of
D. R. Chaffee on oath and in writing, in the name and in behalf of the State, setting forth
that with force and arms at said Providence in said County on the
17th day of May A.D. 1851 Ann E. Finn of Providence Spoke
is a vagrant and that she is an idle person being of
doubtful reputation having means to maintain herself
lives without employment and in this that she is wander-
ing abroad, lodging in watchmen's out houses, market
places, sheds, stables, or uninhabited buildings or in the
open air and not giving a good account of herself
against the Statute and the peace and dignity of the State,
being thereupon arraigned hath pleaded — guilty, and
guilty, and is sentenced to
And the said Ann
upon trial is
Reform School during minority or one month in
the County Jail
and the payment of costs, taxed at
and to stand committed until sentence be performed in all its parts.

Providence, sc.
6185 State, vs. Rosanna C. Whitmore November 19 A.D. 1851
Be it Remembered, That on the 19th day of November 1851
Rosanna C. Whitmore of Providence hath
been brought before the Court of Magistrates for the City of Providence, by virtue of a Warrant issued
against her on the 19th day of November by Charles Hunt one of the
Justices of said Court, and one of the Justices of the Peace for said county, on the complaint of
S. K. Chaffee on oath and in writing, in the name and in behalf of the State, setting forth
that with force and arms at said Providence in said County on the
19th day of November 1851, Rosanna C. Whitmore of
Providence ~~hath~~ a violent assault upon the body
of Ann M. Whitmore did make and he did
beat wound & ill treat —
And the said Rosanna
upon trial is adjudged
the Reform School during minority or 20 days in
County Jail —
and the payment of costs, taxed at
and to stand committed until sentence be performed in all its parts.

until separate facilities for boys and girls were constructed in 1882 on the grounds of the Howard complex in Cranston. The last decade at Tockwotton saw increasing tensions between the school's all-male board of trustees and the newly formed Ladies' Board of Visitors, which was empowered by the state to advocate for girls and women incarcerated in any of Rhode Island's detention facilities. While public civility masked the passions seething between the women and the administrators of the school, the persistent advocacy and demands for equality by the Ladies' Board may have played a major role in the eventual creation of separate boys' and girls' schools at Howard and the 1885 establishment of the State Home and School, a facility that could save orphans and other blameless children from the harsh conditions of the reform school. Elizabeth Buffum Chace was a forceful voice at the center of the efforts that brought both these developments to fruition.¹³

THE COMMITTEE THAT had been charged with establishing the Providence Reform School approached its task with due diligence, visiting similar institutions in Massachusetts, New York, and Philadelphia. An important part of the task was the selection of the school's chief administrator. In retrospect, we might imagine that such a selection raised difficulties posed by differences between this new type of institution, which aimed at rehabilitation through school as well as work, and the earlier models, which were protective, punitive, or largely focused on inculcating habits of industry. Juveniles would be sentenced to the Providence Reform School by the same judicial system that dealt with adult offenders, and although confinement was the only sentence a court could impose, inmates thus sentenced would be required to attend school for four hours every day except Sunday.¹⁴ Given that the institution sought both to incarcerate and to educate, what professional background would the committee look for in a superintendent—experience in a penal system or service as an educator?

The committee members decided in favor of a man then in Connecticut's penal system. "They . . . secured the services of James M. Talcott formerly Deputy Warden of the Connecticut State Prison at Wethersfield as Superintendent of this Institution; a selection which they have since had reason to consider as being in every way fortunate," read the school's first annual report in 1851.¹⁵ In fact, in James Morris Talcott the trustees secured the services of an educator as well as a prison warden; although he had intended to become a clergyman, he had instead been a school teacher in and around Hartford for eight years before assuming the deputy warden's position at the Connecticut prison.¹⁶ Talcott served as the Providence Reform School's superintendent for nineteen of the school's thirty years at Tockwotton, though his years of service were not consecutive, and there is some uncertainty regarding the circumstances of his departure from and return to the school. Talcott was the author—and therefore the editorial voice—of many of the school's surviving documents, most notably its daily journals, and he was also the custodian of a missing volume of the journals spanning the years from 1865 to 1869, the four-year stretch immediately preceding the investigation into allegations of abusive practices at the school. It was Talcott who had to answer to the charges in public testimony, one of which alleged the use of "cruel and inhuman" physical punishment.¹⁷

There are no public records indicating that James Talcott was anything other than a respected, knowledgeable, and responsible institutional manager at the leading edge of the reform school movement. He attended conferences regularly, was in frequent communication with the Reverend E. C. Wines, a noted prison reformer, and was consulted by other states contemplating the creation of reform schools of their own. In 1853, after three years in Providence, Talcott accepted the position of superintendent of the Massachusetts Reform School at Westboro, where he served as the second administrative head of that

institution, and in 1857 he went to New York City to become the superintendent of the Five Points House of Industry there.

One might reasonably interpret Talcott's employment in these other positions as evidence of his impressive reputation; yet questions arose during the 1868-69 investigation of the Providence Reform School suggesting that Talcott's use of harsh physical punishments had been the subject of an earlier probe by the lieutenant governor and the Council of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. References to a document that allegedly contained a recommendation for "the immediate removal of James M. Talcott, the Superintendent" were deemed as inadmissible by Providence mayor Thomas Doyle during the investigation.¹⁸ The notice of Talcott's departure from Westboro in 1857 appeared in a terse phrase in one of that institution's annual reports: "December last Mr. Jas M. Talcott resigned."¹⁹ The circumstances of his resignation were withheld. By 1860 Talcott was employed as a hiring agent at the Willimantic Linen Company in Connecticut.²⁰ The conditions under which he left his position at the Five Points House of Industry are unknown, as are the circumstances of his 1860 return to the Providence Reform School. There he replaced Eleazer Cushman, who appears, by all available documents, to have been a successful educator, reformer, and manager. Talcott's replacement of Cushman may have come about through prior alliances with members of the school's board of trustees, although no documents confirm that possibility.

Public personas and private behaviors are often at odds with one another: private sentiments are frequently disguised in public comments, and backroom politics that lie behind public events are generally concealed. To the extent that the story of the Providence Reform School is the story of James Talcott—his practices, his mandate from the school's board of trustees and the mayor of Providence, his private agenda, his personal goals, his differences with supervising bodies (in

particular, the Ladies' Board of Visitors and Elizabeth Buffum Chace)—we must approach the available records with a critical and sensitive ear for nuance. These records include the postinvestigation journals maintained by Talcott, which detail his interactions with the Ladies' Board of Visitors and Chace. Letters, newly transcribed, provide a counterbalance to public proclamations; among these letters are communications between or about Talcott and the school's other superintendents, Cushman and Martin Eldridge. There is also a back-channel communication from Edwin M. Snow, chairman of the school's board of trustees, a planning document that orchestrated the trustees' response to the Ladies' Board of Visitors' Fourth Annual Report; this response, a memorial to the General Assembly, was published along with the report in 1875.²¹ An 1877 communication from Eleazer Cushman to Martin Eldridge, who replaced Talcott in 1876, suggests that political ties between Talcott and the trustees may have been stronger than the public record could possibly reveal, a significant factor in changes in leadership and an influence on the investigation at the end of the second decade of the school's operation.²²

James Morris Talcott served as the Providence Reform School's superintendent from 1850 to 1853, when he was succeeded by Eleazer McCall Cushman for the remainder of the decade. Talcott then returned to his old job at the school in 1860 and served until 1876, when he was replaced, ostensibly at his insistence that the board of trustees permit him to retire, by Captain Martin B. Eldridge, who continued in the position until the school was divided into separate boys' and girls' facilities at the Howard complex. Thus roughly a year and a half of the extant written records generated by the superintendents came from Cushman (August 1858 to July 1860) and four years came from Eldridge (July 1876 to June 1880);²³ the remainder—much the largest part—came from Talcott. This apportionment of the record reflects the fact that Talcott was the clearly dominant force during

Providence Reform School
Monday August 29th. 1858

*Here begins the second book of our
 daily records. May all our Affairs be discreetly
 ordered, and the spirit of truth guide the hand
 that writes their history.*

*Mr. Wendell Austin, introduced as
 our speaker this P.M. Amos Perry, Esq.
 Principal, Providence High School then City
 Successor to Dr. John Kingdum, and
 Dr. Warren S. Greene.*

*There were present Miss Sprague and
 Mrs. A. Perry, Mrs. S. S. Sprague—
 Miss Henrietta Angell and others.*

Monday Aug. 30th.

*Robert David Peter (Colon) was read,
 this day from Justice Court Newport, Cause
 destroying property. Sentence during minority.*

Tuesday Aug. 31st.

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Wednesday September 1st

*Commencement Day. A large company
 of visitors from abroad visited the school today.*

Thursday Sept 2nd

the school's years at Tockwotton. It was Talcott who implemented a four-pronged rehabilitation program (education, occupational skill, habits of industry, moral instruction); it was Talcott who negotiated with the trustees, the mayor, the Catholic bishop, the Ladies' Board of Visitors, and other political interests; it was Talcott who arranged the placements, monitored the progress of former inmates, and executed the policies that bore on punishments, communication with parents, school curriculum, religious instruction, and actions of his staff. If the institution succeeded in reforming the majority of its inmates, it was largely his success; if the institution became a cauldron of moral corruption, sadistic staff practices, bullying, brutality, and religious intolerance, then the failure was his as well.

JAMES NUTTING's historical account of the Providence Reform School includes very little political background, but it does mention that much skepticism and opposition were initially aroused by three concerns: the proposed school's jurisdiction, its novelty, and its finances. Critics asserted that the operation of a reform school was not a municipal government's proper function; that an institution of that nature was so novel that no reliable precedents could guide its staffing, management, or program organization; and that the school could become a drain on public finances. The Providence Reform School addressed each of these issues: it gained a legal mandate from the General Assembly; it consulted with other institutions for youth in Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts; and it paid for itself by contracting with businesses to set the inmates at paid labor, notably shoemaking and chair caning (for a short time the school also had a contract to make buggy whips).

The school's inmate population grew from around 50 in the first year to about 80 in the second and 100 in the third. The institution settled into a routine: school twice a day for a total of four to five hours, manufacturing work for seven hours, recreation and meals for an hour and a half to two hours, and

religious activities before school and before bed. On Sundays there were extended religious services with invited guests and speakers. Discipline and order were maintained on a grade system of classification consisting of five ranks, or grades. Inmates began at the second grade and could progress upward through the grades by displaying good behavior. Violations of rules resulted in grade demotion and the loss of privileges. Those who maintained themselves in the highest grade would be permitted to visit friends and family, leave the confines of the school to pick berries or dig for clams, or accompany staff members on errands, or they might be placed out "on trial" as servants, farm laborers, or apprentices with surrogate families or be returned to their own homes if that environment was deemed suitable—temperate, free of temptation, and relatively stable.

Although there were occasional jurisdictional skirmishes, political disputes faded into the background as the reform school assumed its place alongside such other Providence institutions as the Butler Asylum, the Dexter Asylum, and the orphanages established for black and Catholic children. Over the first decade the school's population swelled to more than 160 inmates, roughly 20 percent of whom were girls and 9 percent were children of color. The school appeared to be an unqualified success. According to Nutting, a claim that the school, then in its fifth year, had succeeded in reforming only half of its population was "a very conservative statement," and he seems to have been correct.²⁴

It is true that in a substantial study of penal practices by E. C. Wines and Theodore M. Dwight in 1867, the school's report of successful rehabilitation was vague. To the question "What proportion are reformed and turn out well in after life," Talcott's reply was essentially a non-answer: "Most of them are improved. Many do very well. Some take a high rank in the standing of good citizens, and some do very badly—others badly enough."²⁵ Most other states that responded to the same question showed a 15 percent

Eleazer Cushman began one of the reform school's journals with a fervent wish: "Here begins the Second Book of our Daily Records. May all our Affairs be discreetly ordered and the spirit of truth guide the hand that writes their history." Providence Reform School Journal, vol. 1, Aug. 29, 1858, MSS 214, sg 3, ser. 1, RIHS.

to 25 percent failure rate. But a comparison of the names of Providence Reform School inmates with names found on state prison or Providence County jail records during the years after the inmates' release from the school shows no more than a 4 percent reincarceration rate.²⁶ Additional sources, such as letters and census tracking, reveal a handful of former inmates incarcerated in other states, but even if our data somewhat underestimate the number of adult reoffenders, the school's rate of successful reform is nonetheless impressive.

Upon leaving the school, the former inmates returned to their families, found career paths (mostly in low-level work), married, and raised families of their own, with many setting out on new life-course trajectories.²⁷ The Civil War provided an unexpected path for many of the boys; according to reports by the superintendent, over five hundred of them (or about 50 to 60 percent of those sentenced to the school since its opening) enlisted in the army or the navy by 1865.²⁸ Some 20 percent of these enlistees were black, many joining the famous Fourteenth Rhode Island Colored Regiment. Aside from the rigors of military service and its potential for character building, the experience provided former inmates with some valuable and tangible benefits: a bonus, a steady paycheck, and a pension.

Talcott and the trustees served as financial managers for many of the boys who enlisted. "Wm. T. Grinnell esq. Trustee accompanied the boys to the recruiting office and received their bounty money—\$239 each—amounting in the aggregate to \$1673," reads an 1862 entry in the school's journal. "This will be deposited in Savings Bank and remain on interest until the return of the boys or in case they do not return, disposed of as Trustees shall determine."²⁹ According to the school's 1865 annual report, thirteen boys did not return from the war.³⁰

A number of the letters written from military duty stations refer to financial matters. Occasionally former inmates would ask for small amounts to be

forwarded to them, but usually the letters asked the superintendent to deposit monthly paychecks. After a visit from one early inmate, Michael Carr (inmate no. 105), Talcott remarked that Carr had saved \$425 since enlisting in the navy in 1854, and that the young man intended to invest it.³¹

Several letters from William E. Mott (no. 861) contain references to small amounts of money deposited, borrowed, and repaid. The school's records on Mott, who was arrested for larceny and committed to the Providence Reform School in 1861, are quite detailed. Mott rose to the "Class of Truth and Honor," the highest ranking in the grade system of the school during his first year there, but when he failed to return from an unsupervised bathing excursion with other boys near the Red Bridge in East Providence, he was discovered on West Island near New Bedford three days later, returned to the school, and demoted from his high ranking.³²

In August 1863, one month short of completing his two-year sentence, Mott was allowed to enlist in the army.³³ According to letters written in 1865 by a former reform school staff member then living in Bermuda, Mott needed to draw on his accumulated resources after escaping from behind enemy lines and surfacing in Washington, D.C. In 1866 he was planning to establish a shop in New Bedford, and he wrote to Talcott to request the savings he needed to buy stock.³⁴

New Bedford Dec 28th 1866

Mr James M. Talcott

Dear Sir

Pleas to send me the mony that you have as I shall want to use to bye stock with and pleas to send it as soon as you can and pleas to send it by express. I have not found a shop that soot me yet but thire not much danger but what I shall find one as thire seems to be plenty of them to let and I think that I shall find one that will soot me. I cannot write any more now. pleas to give my love to all inquiring friend.

Yours Truly

Wm E. Mott

No 102 4th Street

New Bedford

In his last letter to Talcott three years later, Mott alluded to trips he had taken to Hong Kong and New York subsequent to visiting Talcott at the school, and he announced that he had now relocated to California, where he had purchased land at four dollars an acre. Mott estimated that at current prices—twelve dollars an acre—his land would be worth between eight and ten thousand dollars in five years, and he requested Talcott's assistance in claiming land owed him for his military service; he intended, he said, to add another 160 acres to his real estate holdings. The series of letters and entries in the superintendent's journal paint a portrait of a young man who committed a crime, moved toward rehabilitation, relapsed, recovered, charted a new life-course correction, matured substantially during military service, and emerged as a land-owning farmer in California.

"FROM THE FIRST TO LAST the Providence Reform School was a success," James Nutting asserted in his narrative. "It achieved the end for which it was designed and established." The school clearly does seem to have succeeded in the case of William Mott. But after praising the school as an institution that "will ever remain an honorable chapter in the history of the city of Providence and the state of Rhode Island," Nutting had to deal with the institution's darkest moments at the end of its second decade: the charges of physical and sexual abuse and the ensuing investigation. Despite its success, he said, the school did not "escape criticism" from those "who would not have had it established and were never prepared to see any good thing come of it" and those who were "poorly informed" or "did not take the trouble to understand." Here Nutting shifted to the passive voice, grammatically disguising actors and deflecting blame: Among the critics were "those who discovered that mistakes really were being made."³⁵

Conceding that "methods . . . might be improved" and that "Abuses had crept in," Nutting noted that

"Complaints were made." His next two paragraphs dispose of the episode in a similarly superficial way: "charges were presented"; "It was claimed that vices against chastity and good morals prevailed"; "proselytism and religious intolerance were practiced"; "a joint committee [was] appointed"; "a diversity of sentiment existed"; but "the gravest charges . . . were not clearly proved, except perhaps that of cruel and improper punishment and that of religious intolerance."³⁶ For all of the intensity of the investigation, adjudicated by the Providence aldermen, no charges were sustained. "Although no radical change in officials followed this investigation," Nutting concluded, "its effect upon the school certainly was beneficial. Changes for the better were at once made."³⁷

But there was more to the story, of course. The investigation—which brought "to light a system of cruelty and brutality scarcely paralleled in the history of similar institutions," according to one newspaper—occupied the board of aldermen and captured the attention of the public through newspaper reports for six months.³⁸ Transcripts of the testimony appeared in the *Providence Journal*, with occasional editorial comment, throughout the investigation.

The events that preceded the investigation were not reported in Nutting's account, but they can be reconstructed from newspaper articles in the *Providence Journal*, the *Providence Morning Herald*, and the *Boston Pilot*, a Catholic paper. On September 21, 1868, the two Providence newspapers carried a story, picked up by the *Boston Pilot* on October 3, of a meeting of Catholic citizens the previous day at the cathedral in Providence. Bishop Francis Patrick McFarland told the meeting that he had recently returned from the reform school in Connecticut, where he learned that the Catholic children there were provided with the services of priests and were permitted to leave the institution to attend Sunday Mass; the Catholic children at the Providence Reform School, on the other hand, enjoyed no such accommodations to their religious affiliation, said McFarland. The bishop further reported that as early as July 1867 he had attempted to meet with the Providence Reform School's

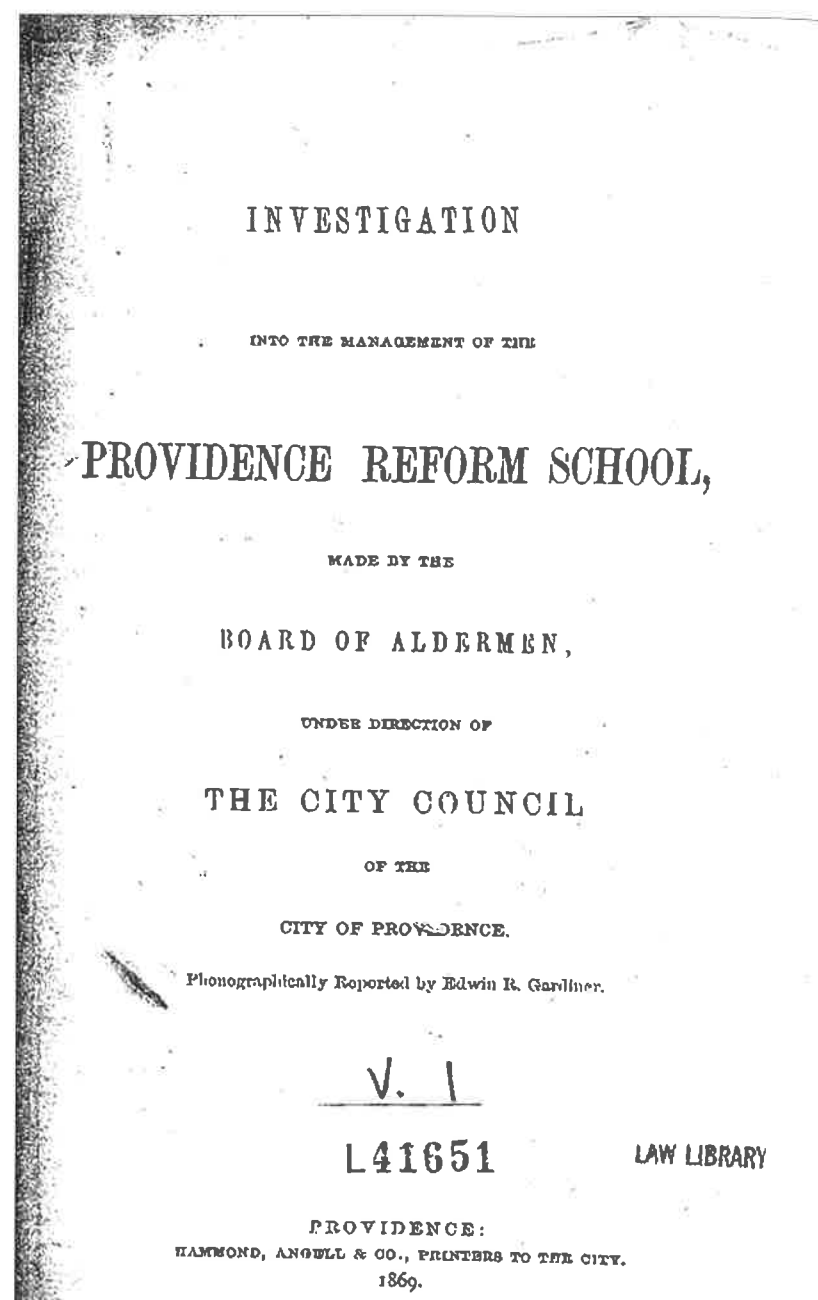
trustees, in particular Mr. Arnold, in order to address the school's treatment of its Catholic inmates. At the only meeting between the two, McFarland requested that the children be allowed access to Catholic texts, but Arnold simply repeated his institution's policy: only nonsectarian books were permitted. The Protestant Bible was considered nonsectarian.

Chairing the meeting after McFarland's report, Thomas Cosgrove, a successful Irish-born businessman, put before it three proposed resolutions to be voted on, resolutions predicated on the claim that the school was violating the rights of religious freedom guaranteed by "our national Constitution and the spirit of American institutions" (see appendix A). The first of the proposed resolutions was

That as Catholics, taxpayers, and voters, in view of this violation of our most cherished rights, and prompted by a desire for proper and humane execution of the laws, we condemn the abuses existing in the school, viz.: First. The allowing of those in a great measure innocent, to be corrupted by the depraved. Second. The degrading and indelicate modes of punishment there inflicted. Third. The policy which deprives Catholic children of learning or practicing their own religion. Fourth. Compelling their attendance at Protestant worship in contradiction of the well known rule of their faith and other efforts in favor of proselytism.

The second resolution was to seek a Catholic presence at the school and on its board of trustees; the third was to "form a society for the purpose of protecting Catholic children, of furthering all projects for their improvement, and securing, by such legal means as we can, the correction of these specified abuses and the granting of the privileges claimed above." The meeting voted to adopt the three resolutions.

The first of the resolutions became the foundation of the eight charges in a petition brought before the board of aldermen by, and on behalf of, the Providence Catholic community on November 23, 1868 (see appendix B). The primary concern of the community centered on what would become the eighth charge, that proselytism and religious intolerance were prevalent at the school, although there was concern also over "the



A complete transcript of testimony at the investigation of the Providence Reform School was published in 1869. Title page of volume 1 of the two-volume *Investigation into the Management of the Providence Reform School* (Providence: Hammond, Angell & Co., 1869); copy from Duke University Law Library.

corruption [of the innocent] by the depraved" and "the degrading and indelicate modes of punishment."³⁹

After the city council approved an investigation of the charges, prosecutors were given one month

to assemble their case. Testimony began before the aldermen on January 7, 1869, in the police court room at Providence City Hall; witnesses there included former staff members, former inmates, and parents of former inmates. The venue then shifted to the west parlor of the reform school, where thirty-six boys and twenty-one girls, all current inmates, testified, as did current members of the school's staff. With the hearings returned to city hall, Superintendent Talcott was called to testify, the last person to do so, on June 3, 1869. Closing arguments followed, and on June 4 the aldermen returned their findings. Although some of the aldermen, as individuals, expressed qualified dissent with the board's majority opinions, none of the charges were sustained.

The investigation nonetheless prompted the General Assembly to establish the Ladies' Board of Visitors, which led to the direct involvement of Elizabeth Buffum Chace and other prominent women of Providence through that committee, as well as providing information that Chace's daughter, Lillie Chace Wyman, eventually used in her short story "The Child of the State," published in 1877.⁴⁰ The testimony also came to the attention of the Reverend Isaac Hecker, the editor of the *Catholic World* and founder of the Paulist order in New York, and it became the central focus of particulars in his 1873 diatribe "Public Charities."⁴¹

THE CHARGES BROUGHT BY the Catholic community may have represented not only a concern about harsh corporal punishments and the immodest language of teachers at the school but also an ethnic community's contest for power vis-à-vis the entrenched Anglo-Protestant leaders in the Providence mayor's office (former mayor and later governor James Y. Smith was affiliated with the anti-immigrant Know-Nothing Party, and Mayor Thomas Doyle was Irish Protestant), the Providence Board of Aldermen, the General Assembly, and the reform school's board of trustees. Led by Thomas Cosgrove, who chaired the meeting at the cathedral, the thirty Providence petitioners who brought the charges

were largely first-generation Irish immigrants who had become successful businessmen in dry goods and liquor.⁴² Along with General Assembly representative Benjamin F. Thurston, the petitioners' case was prosecuted by Charles E. Gorman, a twenty-six-year-old second-generation Irish American lawyer who would become the Assembly's first representative and Speaker of the House of Irish descent. The investigation contributed to volatile local politics during the primary elections of March 1869, when a circular attributed to Fenian sympathizers urged voters to cast ballots against the candidates who supported the reform school.⁴³ Two of the three signers of the circular appeared as petitioners in the charges brought against the school.

James Talcott, who had intended to train for the Protestant clergy before beginning his preparation as an educator, had at least a working relationship with Bishop McFarland. In January 1861 Mary Ann O'Rourke (no. 707) was kidnapped from her placement in Wakefield by an "Irish man and woman" believed to be her parents.⁴⁴ When police searches revealed no trace of her by March, Talcott enlisted McFarland's support, and "Supt. Succeeded in gaining from Bishop McFarland some information respecting the whereabouts of #707 Mary Ann Rourke . . . which may lead to return of s'd girl."⁴⁵ She was not found until August, "Supt. having obtained information leading him to suspect that No 707 Mary Ann Rourke who was kidnapped at Wakefield on the 8th of Jan. last was now kept by her kidnappers at Warwick Neck. He paid that place a visit this afternoon and found her at a home kept by a Mrs. Duncan, [k]nown as 'Beach House,' 'Littlefields,' 'Red Roof' &c. [S]he was assisting in the cooking department. She was dirty & poorly clothed and seemed not only willing but glad to return."⁴⁶ In April of the following year, the girl was placed with Horace W. Talcott, a relative of the superintendent, in Vernon, Connecticut, where she remained for over ten years, living under a pseudonym. "No 707 Mary Ann O'Rourke who to escape from an unnatural mother has called herself for some years 'Mary Baxter' visited us

and will spend a few days. She is quite an intelligent Lady-like woman and is well spoken of where she lives. Has made her home with the same family since leaving us in April 1862, then 13 years old."⁴⁷

Most would agree that the superintendent acted within the bounds of his authority and custodial good sense in recovering Mary Ann O'Rourke, nurturing her over the next year, and finding a protective environment where she could attend school, become a member of the community, and move into an adult life. However, two of the charges raised against the management of the Providence Reform School expressed concerns about changing the names of some of the children and placing them in remote locations without informing the parents of their whereabouts. Given that the charges originated in a religious context within the Irish American community in Providence, one might detect a subtext underlying these two concerns, namely, that Catholic children were being placed with Protestant families as part of an effort to undermine and erode their religious identity. The Reverend Isaac Hecker, a convert to Catholicism, directly indicted the transportation of thousands of Catholic children from institutions in the East to Midwestern locations on the "orphan trains" as an attempt to deprive Catholic children of their faith and its sustaining religious practices.⁴⁸

Hecker and Bishop McFarland maintained contact with each other. McFarland subscribed to the *Catholic World*, published in New York, and through an intermediary he passed along the information he had about the Providence Reform School. Such back-channel communications and the organized effort of the local Catholic community suggest that the school became a flash point as part of a wider political agenda, an issue couched in moral and ethical sentiments but bolstered by an appeal to the constitutional rights guaranteed by the First Amendment. The challenge sought the moral high ground through legal arguments—that public institutions could not abridge the right to religious freedom. But in adjudicating the charges against the school, Providence's board of aldermen held that

the bylaws of the school entitled the superintendent to determine the nature of the religious component of the rehabilitative program, and that "nondenominational" practices did not violate the bylaws. It was a matter for Superintendent Talcott, to decide.

THE HIGH PROFILE OF the investigation and the sensational newspaper coverage of the testimony, much of which involved the punishment of girls, did not escape the attention of the General Assembly, which created the Ladies' Board of Visitors in 1870 to monitor all of the state's facilities incarcerating women.⁴⁹ The board, which from its inception included Elizabeth Buffum Chace as one of its seven appointed members, was charged with visiting each of the penal institutions that incarcerated women "at least once in three months" to monitor the conditions, facilities, and treatment at each and to submit an annual report of their findings.⁵⁰

Although the administration, the bylaws, and the management of the Providence Reform School did not change as a result of the investigation, vigilance and monitoring became more public. In a nineteenth-century version of "transparency," the superintendent kept more explicit records of punishments in his daily journal—and the Ladies' Board of Visitors was watching. We cannot know whether Superintendent Talcott was admonished by the trustees and advised to maintain such records, but in May 1869 the journals began to include long and detailed descriptions of inmates' misbehavior and the actions taken in response. Talcott also noted the dates and durations of the visits made by the Ladies' Board and, where warranted, the substance of any verbal exchanges that ensued, exchanges that became more contentious during the board's first five years. Nutting's summary of the aftermath of the investigation is both cursory and opaque: "Milder forms of punishment were substituted . . . better work was done than ever before. . . . An improved order [was] obtained."⁵¹ The summary includes no mention of the new form of

vigilance legislatively invested in the Ladies' Board of Visitors, which now had the potential to challenge the school's male-dominated ideas of organization, practice, and control, particularly as they might affect the rescue and rehabilitation of young girls. It became clear that Elizabeth Buffum Chace rejected the physical punishment of girls as a rehabilitative practice. Nonetheless, Talcott continued to use the grade system, separate confinement, deprivation of privileges, and mild corporal punishment as disciplinary practices for both boys and girls.

Chace objected to physical punishment as inappropriate treatment of young girls under any circumstances, and she said so in an exchange with Talcott over the treatment of Alice E. Murphy (no. 1229) in 1875, an exchange recorded in the school's daily journal. After being told of the cause, manner, and severity of Alice's punishment, Chace replied, "You ought not to have used the Rattan," and she went on to say that "such punishment should never be used upon a girl 17 years old." The exchange continued: "She was asked what should be done and replied 'Shut them up' [i.e., confine misbehaving girls to one of the school's isolation rooms]. When told this would have given [Alice] an opportunity to keep the article [a stolen pencil] from coming to light and induce her and others to try the same and then defeat the whole design of our works, [Chace] said 'Shut her up 5 weeks if she did not tell the truth.' When told of [Alice's] manner when shut up, whistling, singing, pounding &c &c disturbing the whole home and sometimes attracting the attention of passers by [in] the streets [Chace] said 'Let the whole house be disturbed then, the rattan ought not be used.' The question was then asked to Mrs. Doyle [another member of the Ladies' Board] which would be best? She replied 'I fear I should use the rattan.'"⁵²

According to a school report, Alice Murphy had been charged with theft and sentenced to the school in 1864, when she was ten years old.⁵³ She had received the harshest sentence permitted: she would remain under

the school's jurisdiction until she reached the age of twenty-one. Although some of the records are missing, it appears that the superintendent tried to find trial placements for her with families outside the institution.⁵⁴ In April 1868 a stable placement apparently was found with John A. Gorton, first in New Shoreham and later, when his family moved, in Newport. According to a note accompanying the school's information about her placement, "Her peculiarities are such as to seem better for her to be in a secluded place with a small family than to be in the Institution."⁵⁵ The "peculiarities" of this thirteen-year-old girl were not further specified, but when the superintendent made a supervisory visit to the Gorton home in June 1870, he "found her the same Alice. Mr. Gorton says 'Can't guess at her.'"⁵⁶ The school records contain no note of her return from the Gorton household, but a letter from C. W. Gorton (John Gorton's wife), received in March 1871, alerted Talcott that he could anticipate Alice's return by boat. The letter contained very little detail about the reasons for the failure of the placement, which had lasted for three years; it said simply, "I shall send her up Friday March 17th if nothing hinder. I don't know what she will say of me, but I have done the best I could by her."⁵⁷

A detailed record of Alice Murphy's misbehavior within the institution begins in August 1873, when a pattern of disobedience, defiance, and erratic behavior set in, much of it conspiring with other girls to communicate with the boys. The school's response was to confine her to "the closet" during the day and to her room during the night.⁵⁸ By the last days of 1874 she had evidently become compliant enough to be allowed to leave the grounds and visit with her former placement family, the Gortons.⁵⁹ The following year, however, the behaviors for which she would be more severely punished—conspiring with other girls to steal paper and pencils to write notes to boys and lying about the theft—occupy entries over three days in April, prompting Talcott to "apply the rattan" to evoke the "truth."⁶⁰ In May a cabal of girls, including Alice Murphy, became "restless and inattentive in their

studies" and returned to their old ways (stealing paper and lying). "Alice Murphy who appeared to be a leading spirit among them was placed [in confinement] in the corner room," but this time she did not receive corporal punishment.⁶¹ The objectionable behaviors continued through July, when the girls became so disorderly that "[t]hey were accordingly each punished with a small rattan this morn and not allowed to have conversation or to play with their companions this week."⁶² The cycle of defiance, erratic outbursts, theft, and lying continued through September 1875, when Elizabeth Buffum Chace and Mrs. Doyle conducted their visit.⁶³ After receiving her final external placement a year later, Alice Murphy was given her discharge from the school when she turned twenty-one, that action being recorded in the school's report in January 1877.⁶⁴

Elizabeth Buffum Chace and Mrs. Doyle disagreed on the use of the rattan to provide discipline to girls in the Providence Reform School. Others objected less to the fact of corporal punishment than to the claim that the application of the rattan to the bare backs of young girls placed the girls in an immodest state of exposure.⁶⁵ But whatever the individual differences on the matter among the members of the Ladies' Board, the institutional managers, or the public at large, the Ladies' Board of Visitors had no power to alter institutional policies. The General Assembly had delegated to the Ladies' Board the responsibility to observe and report, but not to alter any practices set by the all-male board of trustees. Thus the ladies could only witness, request, and plead; and the record in fact shows that they concentrated on larger issues of equal treatment for the girls rather than merely on methods of punishment.

Just as the Irish Catholic community had couched its complaints about religious intolerance in the language of First Amendment rights during the investigation in 1869, the Ladies' Board framed its criticisms in terms of fairness, equity, and equal treatment. Members of the Ladies' Board, which was organized on September 14, 1870, visited the school no less than seven times between October and December of that year, and the

board filed its first annual report with Governor Seth Padelford on January 17, 1871. The report contained no scathing condemnation or sensational rhetoric, but after extending polite praise to the "perfect order, neatness and propriety of every part of this institution, to the admirable training which the girls receive, and to the uniform kindness of those who have them in charge," it added a qualification: "The system itself is, however, a somewhat severe one, and we trust that slight changes in details may be made." The report then offered an observation that would form the underpinnings of a growing set of demands in successive reports: that true rehabilitation could not be achieved if the girls experienced treatment which engendered in them feelings of injustice, unfairness, and persecution. To achieve a genuine "change of character," the girls "must be made to feel that they are not prisoners . . . but inmates of a House where their best good is sought."⁶⁶

The first focus of the ladies' advocacy was directed at unpaid labor. Observing that girls of a comparable age could be earning a dollar per day for similar work outside the institution, the board's first annual report noted that the "work [of the girls] is continuous; seven hours a day with two intermissions of ten minutes each. The school is before breakfast and after supper." The dignity and incentives associated with paid labor, including the savings that would accrue against the girls' future release, "would give them a new impulse and tend to make life of useful labor look attractive to them," the ladies argued. "It would save them from the temptations which always beset the penniless."⁶⁷ As mild as these statements might appear to be in this first formal report, they foreshadowed the ladies' criticism of the unequal treatment that the girls received, criticism that would result in increasingly strong demands for changes in many of the school's practices: the girls' uncompensated labor, inadequate recreational time and facilities, inappropriate times of day for their four hours of formal schooling, unequal seating during religious exercises (the girls were separated from the boys in a raised gallery screened

from the audience and the speakers by a curtain), and poor bathing facilities. To these concerns the ladies added a request for a female doctor to attend to the specific health needs of the girls.

Over the years a contentious relationship built up between the Ladies' Board of Visitors and the school's administration. One can see a hint of that tension in the exchange between Elizabeth Buffum Chace and James Talcott about the punishment administered to Alice Murphy. Talcott's journal entry for that September 1875 day ended with this: "Mrs. C does not like the girls gallery or yard still made no suggestions to improve them nor did she recommend any mark to discipline the girls except to 'shut them up.'"⁶⁸

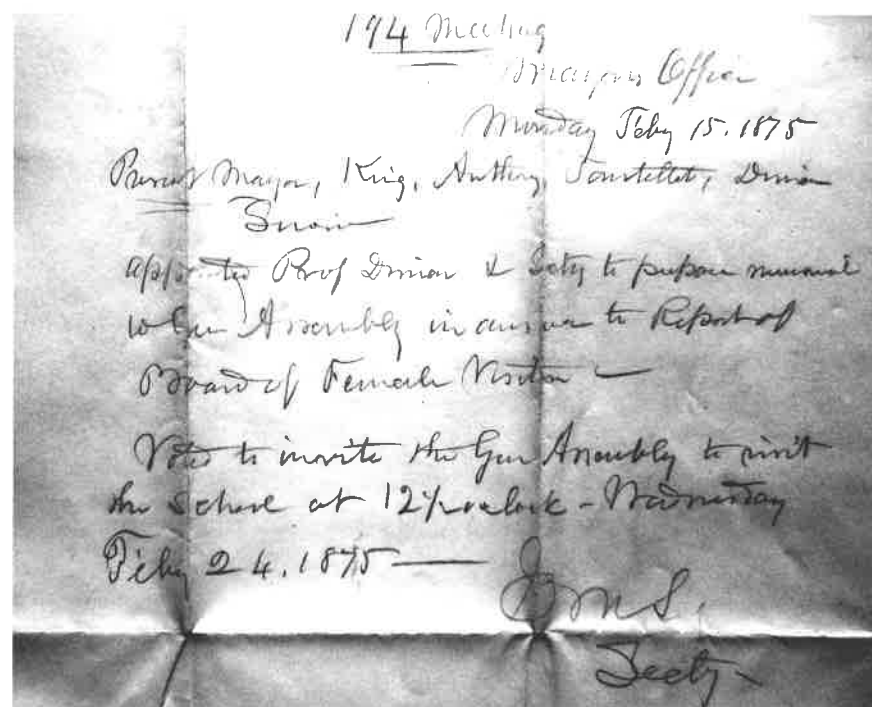
THE SIMMERING CAULDRON of contention rose to a boil in 1875. Nutting reports nothing of consequence between the investigation in 1869 and the eventual transfer of authority of the Providence Reform School to the State Board of Charities in 1880, but in fact significant things happened.

Nutting seems not to have taken particular notice of the 1875 annual report of the Ladies' Board—a report raising the issues of the girls' unpaid labor, inadequate playground time and facilities, poor accommodations for bathing, inappropriate classroom hours, and seating at religious services inferior to that of the boys, as well as the lack of a female doctor at the school—but that year the school's board of trustees deemed it necessary to respond to the ladies with a public memorial submitted to the General Assembly.⁶⁹ The framework of the memorial was supplied by a planning document drafted by the board of trustees' chairman, Edwin M. Snow. This document summarized the first five reports of the Ladies' Board of Visitors, outlined the relevant history of the Ladies' Board, and called for a response. "The whole words and spirit of the recent report," Snow wrote, "are in direct opposition and contrast to those of previous reports. I am satisfied from my own reflections, and also from what others say that we ought to take notice of and answer the Ladies' report."⁷⁰

To the Trustees of the
Reform School
Gentlemen
At a meeting of
the Board of Lady visitors &c.
the following resolutions were
passed:— That we request of
you, that the hours of in-
struction in the girls' school
room shall be between 8 and
12 in the forenoon, or 1 and
4 in the afternoon: also, that
the baths of the girls shall
be under the care of a person
of our selection, from among
those employed in the school,
and that the bathroom shall
be so arranged as to secure
privacy for each one: also,
that a woman physician

shall be employed to
visit the Reform School at
stated times, to give to the
girls such attention as she
may find they require.
on behalf of the Board
Ellen L. Buffum Sec.
Prov. Jan. 13th 1875

A letter sent to the reform school's trustees on behalf of the Ladies' Board of Visitors, objecting to the school's treatment of girls, helped precipitate the trustees' 1875 memorial to the General Assembly. Providence City Archives.



Minutes of a meeting of the reform school's board of trustees, held in the Providence mayor's office, record the appointment of authors to draft a memorial response to the Ladies' Board of Visitors' Fourth Annual Report. Providence City Archives.

Basically, the memorial response of the trustees—intended to “correct” the record—claimed that they had been unfairly surprised by the ladies’ new demands, that the women had praised the institutional practices in prior reports, and that the trustees had already addressed the concerns that the Ladies’ Board had brought to their attention. The memorial’s last paragraph justified the slow deliberations and decisions of the trustees as the result of a weighty mandate “to administer [the school’s] affairs according to their own best judgment,” even when dealing with recommendations for change from the Ladies’ Board. When implementations had been “delayed,” it was because such “recommendations required consideration”; when requests had been denied, it was because “compliance would have been inconsistent with the best interests of the Institution.” The memorial’s final sentence implicitly contrasted the sober and diligent judgments of the trustees on behalf of the institution’s “best interests” with the misguided but “urgent” requests of the Ladies’ Board: “When,

in a few instances, after urgent solicitations from members of the Board of Visitors, [the trustees] have relaxed the rules of the School, the results have not been of a nature to warrant a frequent repetition of the experiment.”⁷¹ To what “urgent solicitations” did the memorial refer? Were the trustees actually referring here to the specific requests and complaints of the Ladies’ Board?

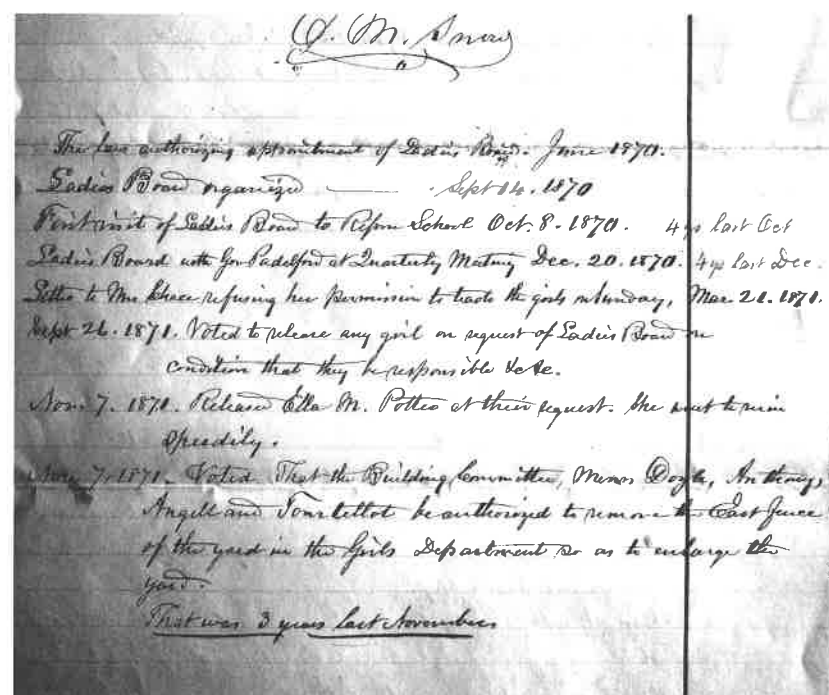
Chronicling a series of dealings between the Ladies’ Board and the school since the board’s inception in September 1870, Snow’s document made note of a March 21, 1871, letter from the school to a Ladies’ Board member, refusing her permission to

take the girls for a Sunday outing. “Sept. 26, 1871,” Snow continued, “Voted to release any girl [for a trial placement] on request of Ladies Board on condition that they be responsible &c &c. Nov. 7, 1871 Released Ella M. Potter at their Request. She went to ruin speedily.” Going “to ruin” was obviously a euphemism for sexual misconduct. Many of the girls were incarcerated in the school for prostitution, and when they were placed out on trial, they frequently returned pregnant. Although the memorial did not specifically mention Ella M. Potter, its indictment of the Ladies’ Board for inept meddling was clear. Snow’s reference to the case suggests that the trustees were ready to put the blame for Ella Potter’s lapse into immorality on the shoulders of the ladies, who had been less than vigilant for the young girl and irresponsible as guardians of her virtue. But was Snow’s account of the case accurate?

We can trace Ella Potter’s history through the superintendent’s records, and we can also compare her fate to that of other girls placed out either at the request of the Ladies’ Board or by James Talcott and the trustees on their own initiative. Ella M. Potter (no. 1723) was eighteen years old when she was sentenced to the reform school in April 1869 for prostitution.⁷² She would become eligible for discharge at the age of twenty-one. After she had been confined for two years, Mrs. I. G. Chace of the Ladies’ Board arranged to have Ella placed with Mr. and Mrs. William Thornton of Warwick in February 1872.⁷³ Having been discharged “as per action of the visiting committee” in July of that year, Ella remained in her placement with the Thorntons.⁷⁴ A year later Talcott recorded a visit from Mrs. Thornton, who expressed her fear that Ella would not be able to resist temptation when her term of placement expired. Talcott visited Ella the next week and subsequently reported that he “[f]ound her well & doing perhaps as well as could be expected under the circumstances. Her home is no more than mediocre one. She finds enough to do and is not extravagantly clothed.”⁷⁵ There is no indication in Talcott’s records that Ella M. Potter “went to ruin,” speedily or otherwise.

In impugning the influence of the Ladies’ Board when the trustees “relaxed the rules of the School,” the authors of the memorial were probably wise to avoid citing specific cases of girls who were released on the recommendation of the ladies and those who were released by the superintendent and the trustees themselves. Among the former, along with Ella Potter, were Cynthia Ward (no. 2036) and Sarah King (no. 1716), who did not come to “ruin”; among the latter were Rachel Cook (no. 1875) and Julia McGuinnis (no. 1856), who fared very badly indeed.⁷⁶ The case of Cora B. Cameron (no. 1945) was perhaps somewhat less clear. After her father had arranged a series of unsuccessful placements for her, with the girl returning to the school every few months, Mrs. Lippitt, a Ladies’ Board member, recommended another placement in 1873, and this too proved unsuccessful. In 1875, two years after Mrs. Lippitt had any involvement with the case, Cora Cameron was arrested for lewd and wanton behavior. She remained at the school until another placement was arranged in 1877, and from this placement she returned pregnant in 1879. During this entire time her monitoring was the responsibility of the school’s superintendent and trustees.⁷⁷

In 1876 four members of the Ladies’ Board of Visitors—Sarah E. H. Doyle, Abby D. Weaver, Eliza C. Weeden, and Elizabeth Buffum Chace—submitted their resignations to Governor Henry Lippitt. Speaking from her six years of service and frustration, Chace declared that the members of the Ladies’ Board held an office that “confers on its holders no power to decide,” rendering them “nearly useless,” and she articulated the position shared by the other resigning women: “That the influence of women is indispensable . . . but to make it effectual [it] must be obtained by placing women on the boards of direct control.”⁷⁸ In January of that year, recovering from surgery in Boston and unable to visit the Reform School, Chace had written to Amos D. Lockwood, a trustee signatory of the memorial, asking if he had “looked into the matters I presented to your consideration some months ago.”⁷⁹ These included all of the issues raised by the Ladies’ Board



This summary of the history of the Ladies’ Board of Visitors, prepared by Edwin M. Snow, includes the claim that Ella M. Potter “went to ruin speedily.” Providence City Archives.

of Visitors in its report of 1875. Apparently not receiving a satisfactory reply from Lockwood, Chace resigned from the Ladies' Board in March 1876, but she was persuaded to rejoin the board three months later.⁸⁰

Chace's daughter, Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman, published her story "The Child of the State" the following year. Written in the tradition of "critical realism," this was a tale of Josie Welch, a reform school girl who does, in fact, go to ruin speedily. The story's fictional institution, whose female inmates endure inadequate recreational facilities, endless work, and segregated accommodations in the chapel, was clearly based on the Providence Reform School, and Josie herself acts in ways and incurs punishments common among the girls at the real institution: cutting her hair, communicating with boys, stealing school supplies, defying the staff, and creating disturbances, for which misbehavior she is struck with a rattan, doused with cold water, or placed in confinement. Josie's favorite doll, given to her by a kind visitor, is forcefully taken from her, an incident possibly reflecting the concern of Ellen Buckley (no. 1252) for a missing doll that had belonged to her. And just as Julia McGuinnis had helped Mary Ann Gehegan (no. 1692) do in 1870, Josie Welch escapes from the institution disguised as a boy.

Wyman may have learned about some of the elements that she used in her story from the 1869 investigation, but her mother was no doubt also a source of information for her.⁸¹ Greatly distressed by her visits to the Providence Reform School, Chace had become convinced that Rhode Island needed a separate facility for wayward girls who had not yet become hardened, corrupted, and criminal. Signing herself with reference to her official affiliation with "the State Board of Visitors," on November 25, 1870, she wrote a letter to "Mr. Talcut," asking the superintendent to receive a Mr. Whitney, then affiliated with the Lancaster School for Girls, who wished to visit and examine the "workings of your school."⁸²

Most of the second annual report of the Ladies' Board to the General Assembly in 1872 focused on the

problems posed by the incarceration of boys and girls together at the Providence school, and it proposed a solution: the creation of another institution just for girls. The ladies may or may not have visited the Industrial School for Girls in Lancaster, Massachusetts, but they certainly knew of it, and their report described it in great detail as a model upon which a similar school in Rhode Island could be based.⁸³ The report added what might have been a rhetorical ploy calculated to influence the Providence school's all-male trustees: "Never has there been so favorable a time for a change. . . . The number of girls . . . is only thirty. By their removal a re-arrangement . . . [of] . . . some system of grading may be introduced for the boys."⁸⁴ The appeal was simple: get rid of the girls and the trustees could have a free hand in managing the entire institution for boys.

We do not know how much effect, if any, this appeal had on the trustees, but in July 1880 control of the school was transferred from the City of Providence to the Rhode Island's Board of State Charities and Corrections. The school was then relocated to the grounds of the Howard complex in Cranston, with separate facilities for girls and boys. The Oaklawn School for Girls was ready for occupancy in July 1882, the Sockanosset School for Boys in December 1882.⁸⁵

THE INVESTIGATION OF the Providence Reform School in 1869 precipitated the cascade of events that defined the history of the school in its third decade. The pressures originating in the activism of the Irish American community and a growing women's movement organized around issues of social equity resulted in the establishment of the Ladies' Board of Visitors by the General Assembly. With the investigation bringing the internal practices of the school into public focus, the Ladies' Board protested the institution's inferior treatment of girls, as did Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman in "The Child of the State," and the Reverend Isaac Hecker exposed the denial of religious freedom to Catholic inmates. All of this criticism framed the objectionable practices in the

context of state-sponsored neglect. The exchanges between the Ladies' Board and the school's trustees in 1875 and the resultant resignation of board members over their lack of any real power were eventually followed by the transfer of authority for the school to the State Board of Charities and Corrections, the school's division into separate facilities for boys and girls, and a commitment from the General Assembly to create a State Industrial School.

Nutting recounted most of the major events in the three-decade life of the Providence Reform School at Tockwotton, but he missed the larger picture—the struggles of groups outside the school to influence and shape the school's operations and policies. Many of the people involved in these groups were individually powerless and frequently nameless, but as an aggregate they helped bring about significant changes in attitudes toward troubled children, and in concerns about how those children were to be rescued. That is the story Nutting missed. From the historical records now available we can hear a variety of other voices from that time: Through the school's journals and reports, James Talcott can speak; through a petition for redress of grievances, the Irish community can speak; through annual reports and press coverage, Elizabeth Buffum Chace and the Ladies' Board of Visitors can speak; through a short story in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman can speak; through *Catholic World*, a religious constituency can speak; and through the testimony elicited by Benjamin Thurston and Charles E. Gorman, together with thousands of letters and hundreds of pages of trial transcripts, the children themselves, their parents, and the school's staff can speak. These voices can tell us of an important but largely forgotten part of Rhode Island's institutional history.

For more information and educational materials on this subject, see under Education at www.rihs.org.

Appendix A: Catholic Citizens' Resolutions, September 1868

WHEREAS, The fundamental principle of our national Constitution and the spirit of American institutions, guarantee perfect religious freedom and grant us the assurance that no law shall be made to abrogate the right of conscience, and as the spirit of Christianity and our common law forbid all violation of propriety and command justice, and as the citizens of Rhode Island claim to be the foremost amongst Americans in recognition of these leading principles and a desire for their fulfilment; and

WHEREAS, The management of our Reform School is in striking contradiction of these assurances and in disregard of these principles, be it

Resolved, That as Catholics, taxpayers, and voters, in view of this violation of our most cherished rights, and prompted by a desire for proper and humane execution of the laws, we condemn the abuses existing in the school, viz.: First. The allowing of those in a great measure innocent, to be corrupted by the depraved. Second. The degrading and indelicate modes of punishment there inflicted. Third. The policy which deprives Catholic children of learning or practicing their own religion. Fourth. Compelling their attendance at Protestant worship in contradiction of the well known rule of their faith and other efforts in favor of proselytism; and further

Resolved, That until such time as we can erect a protectorate of our own in which direction we pledge our early efforts, we claim the following privileges: First. That a number of Catholics competent to teach the Catholic children confined there the principles of their faith, be allowed a weekly visit for the purpose of doing so. Second. That a Catholic clergyman may be allowed to celebrate mass in the institution, at which the Catholic children may be present. Third. The appointment of a Catholic upon the Board of Trustees. And in order to secure these privileges, be it

Resolved, That we form a society for the purpose of protecting Catholic children, of furthering all projects for their improvement, and securing, by such legal means as we can, the correction of these specified abuses and the granting of the privileges claimed above.

Text from Providence Journal, Sept. 21, 1868, and Boston Pilot, October 3, 1868.

Appendix B:

Charges Brought before the Providence Board of Aldermen, November 1868

First charge.

“That vices against chastity, decency and good morals have prevailed in the school, and have been taught and practiced by teachers as well as by pupils. That these vices have existed both in the male and female departments, and that the children usually leave the school more corrupt than when they entered it.”

Second charge.

“That teachers have used immodest and disgusting language in the presence of the children; and have addressed females in an indecent manner by referring to their past characters and by calling them vile and unbecoming names.”

Third charge.

“That modes of punishment the most cruel and inhuman have been used in said school, such as knocking down and kicking the pupils and whipping them when naked, and with a severity not deserved by their offences.”

Fourth charge.

“That young women are said to have been kicked, knocked down, dragged about by the hair of the head, and otherwise brutally treated, but more specially that all modesty and decency have been outraged by stripping them to the waist and lashing on the naked back; taking them from their beds and whipping them in their night dresses; tying their hands and feet and ducking them, and by other forms of punishment which no man should ever inflict on a woman.”

Fifth charge.

“That the names of children committed to said school have been changed and altered by the officers of the said institution.”

Sixth charge.

“That children have been apprenticed to persons living in remote sections of the country, and who have no interest in taking proper care of them; and that a needless disregard for the rights and feelings of their parents has been often evinced by the officers of the school.”

Seventh charge.

“That the goods of said school are reported to have been used dishonestly for purposes for which they were not intended; and that the State of Rhode Island is said to have been charged with the board of children who were living at service and were no expense to the said school.”

Eighth charge.

“That a spirit of proselytism and of religious intolerance has prevailed in the school, as is shown by the fact that children of different creeds are compelled to attend a form of worship which is contrary to the conscientious convictions of a large majority of them; which is directly in conflict with the spirit and letter of our State Constitution, which ensures to the inhabitants thereof the liberty of conscience in the following language: ‘No man shall be compelled to frequent or to support any religious worship, place or ministry what ever, except in fulfillment of his own voluntary contract’; and that the children of said school are denied the use of books, and all religious instruction in the religion of their choice.”

Text from Investigation into the Management of the Providence Reform School, Made by the Board of Alderman, under the Direction of the City Council of the City of Providence (*Providence: Hammond, Angell & Co. Printers, 1869*), 1:iii-iv.

Notes

1. James H. Nutting, “The Poor, the Defective and the Criminal,” in *State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations at the End of the Century: A History*, ed. Edward Field (Boston: Mason Publishing Co., 1902), 3:389-490.

2. These documents include the school’s daily journals, biweekly reports, and one volume of trustees’ minutes at the Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS); one daily journal missing from the RIHS collection, a box of over 2,000 letters (1,580 personal letters, now being transcribed and cataloged, and several hundred business letters, currently unprocessed), police orders, city watch reports, and mayors’ incoming and outgoing correspondence at the Providence City Archives; prison rosters, legislative acts, petitions, criminal commitment ledgers, annual reports, vital records, and federal and state censuses at the Rhode Island State Archives; and Supreme Court, Magistrate Court, Court of Common Pleas, and divorce records at the Rhode Island Judicial Archives. Acknowledgements must be given to Stonehill College undergraduate research scholars Joanna Channell, Melissa Carr, Ally DiCenso, Kelly Edmonston, Zachary Ennis, Lindsay Henry, Brittany Kaminski, Kayla O’Malley, Kerry Potter, Jessica Roberge, Elizabeth Ruginis, Laura Schulz, and Courtney Sullivan, who transcribed all of the manuscripts and letters and searched the archives for other documents relating to each inmate.

3. A March 5, 1862, letter to Superintendent James Talcott from E. M. Magill at the Boston Latin School explains how an escaped slave arrived in Providence: “The girl Mary came with us from Pennsylvania some years since. She, in company with some other ‘Contrabands,’ came to my Father’s at New Hope, Bucks Co Pa, where I found her” (Reform School Letters, Providence City Archives).

4. Magistrate Court Records, Providence County, vol. 6, Oct. 31, 1850, case no. 5156, Rhode Island
- Judicial Archives, Galloway’s name also appears in these records as Galloway, Galaway, and Galway; as with many records from this period, variant spellings of surnames are common.

5. 1850 federal census, Providence, Wd-1 (Providence County), ser. M432, roll 844, p. 85.

6. See Michael Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968). This account documents the evolution of the Massachusetts Reform School at Westboro and describes why the legislature insisted the institution be called a school rather than an asylum or house of industry. The steps which led to the Providence Reform School matched those taken in Massachusetts, and Rhode Island adopted the designation of the institution as a school to become the second such institution in the United States.

7. Providence Reform School, First Annual Report, MSS 214, sg 3, RIHS.

8. Massachusetts: “An Act to Establish the State Reform School,” 1847, chap. 185, *Acts and Resolves* (Boston, 1847), 405-7; Rhode Island: Reform School Act, MSS 214, sg. 3, RIHS.

9. Providence Reform School, First Annual Report, 7.

10. Legislative Acts, 181 HR, Feb. 6, 1851, Rhode Island State Archives.

11. Case no. 5577, Ellen Morrisey, charged with assaulting Maria Norris, Magistrate Court Records, Providence County, vol. 7, May 17, 1851; case no. 5587, Ann E. Finn, charged with vagrancy, *ibid.*, May 19, 1851; case no. 6185, Rosanna C. Whitamore [Whittemore], charged with assaulting her mother, *ibid.*, Nov. 19, 1851. (The court record in the last-cited case does not identify the victim as the perpetrator’s mother, but census records show that relationship.)

12. Providence Reform School, First Annual Report, 7.
13. See Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman and Arthur Crawford Wyman, *Elizabeth Buffum Chace, 1806-1899: Her Life and Its Environment* (Boston: W. B. Clarke, 1914), 2:65, and Sandra L. Enos, "The Emergence of Child Welfare at the State Home and School, Rhode Island's Public Orphanage," *Rhode Island History* 65 (2007): 70-71.
14. Interestingly, mandatory schooling requirements in Rhode Island followed the establishment of the reform school, a pattern that occurred in other states as well. The nation's first compulsory school attendance laws were passed in Massachusetts in 1852, five years after the reform school at Westboro was opened, and in every state that had both a reform school and public schools, compulsory attendance laws similarly followed the establishment of a reform school. John G. Richardson, "Common Delinquent, and Special: On the Formalization of Common Schooling in the American States," *American Educational Research Journal* 31 (winter 1994): 695-723.
15. Providence Reform School, First Annual Report, 10.
16. *Biographical Record of Tolland and Windham Counties, Connecticut* (Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1903), 823.
17. *Investigation into the Management of the Providence Reform School, Made by the Board of Alderman, under the Direction of the City Council of the City of Providence* (Providence: Hammond, Angell & Co. Printers, 1869), vols. 1 and 2. This text, a complete transcript of the testimony, is difficult to find. The Providence City Archives possesses one copy, which contains handwritten marginalia; the Duke University Law Library houses another copy, printed with two blank pages. Our research team has copied both volumes.

18. Ibid., 1:482, contains the request to admit evidence from Westboro and the denial of that request; an editorial in the *Providence Journal*, May 5, 1869, criticizes Mayor Doyle's denial of the request and adds information about the source of the Massachusetts investigation and the nature of its recommendations.
19. Westboro Reform School, Eleventh Annual Report, 1858, p. 5, Massachusetts State Archives.
20. The biographical sketch of Talcott's professional life in *Tolland and Windham Counties*, 823, is unreliable, asserting that Talcott was superintendent of the Providence Reform School for five years before being "called to a similar position at Westboro . . . where he also remained for five years, resigning only when at the point of absolute collapse from so prolonged and intense a strain," and that after a vacation, he "took a position as agent of the Willimantic Linen Company . . . [for] three years" before returning to Providence. The figures here are clearly inaccurate, and there is no mention of Talcott's service at the Five Points House of Industry in New York. Had Talcott spent three years at the Willimantic Linen Company after ten years of employment in reform schools, he would have rejoined the Providence Reform School in 1863 rather than in 1860. We are more certain of his employment at the Willimantic Linen Company from a letter dated July 30, 1865, from a former inmate of Westboro, William H. Maxwell (Reform School Letters). In the 1860 federal census (M653, 92, p. 146, Windham, Conn.), James Talcott, misrecorded as Talot, appears with his wife and daughter residing next to the owners of the company.
21. Snow's communication is undated, but it is included in a folder that contains a note dated February 15, 1875, which appears to be the minutes of a meeting between the trustees and Mayor Doyle in the mayor's office; it

was determined at that meeting that a memorial should be composed in response to the Fourth Annual Report of the Ladies' Board of Visitors. The ladies' report is dated March 10, 1874; the memorial response is dated February 23, 1875.

22. Eleazer Cushman to Martin Eldridge, July 24, 1877, Reform School Letters.
23. Cushman's entries are in the Providence Reform School's journal, vol. 1, Aug. 29, 1858-May 19, 1864, MSS 214, sg 3, ser. 1, RIHS; this, the earliest volume to survive, is actually the second journal in the series, the first having been lost. Eldridge's entries are in the journal covering Dec. 16, 1875, to June 18, 1880, the last surviving volume, which has become separated from the main collection of the materials held at the Rhode Island Historical Society and can be found at the Providence City Archives.
24. Nutting, "The Poor," 480.
25. E. C. Wines and Timothy Dwight, *Report on the Prisons and Reformatories of the United States and Canada, Made to the Legislature of New York, January 1867* (Albany, N.Y.: Van Benthuysen & Sons' Steam Printing House, 1867), 441.
26. A complete index of the state prison population from 1838 to 1910 is available in the Rhode Island State Archives, and the names of inmates at the Providence County Jail and the state farm can be extracted at five-year intervals from state and federal census records. The recidivism rate cited here is based on incarcerations, not arrests; former inmates might have been arrested for minor offenses (such as drunkenness) and fined rather than sentenced.
27. On "life-course trajectories," see four studies by Robert J. Sampson and John H. Laub: *Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning Points through Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); "Socioeconomic Achievement in the Life Course of

Disadvantaged Men: Military Service as a Turning Point, circa 1940-1965," *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 347-67; *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); "Life-Course Desisters? Trajectories of Crime among Delinquent Boys Followed to Age 70," *Criminology* 41 (2003): 301-40.

28. Providence Reform School, Fourteenth Annual Report, in Providence City Documents from June 1864-June 1865, Rhode Island State Archives. The city began to print and bind its documents in 1854; the school's first and third annual reports are available in manuscript form at the RIHS, but the second annual report is apparently missing.
29. Providence Reform School, Journal, vol. 1, Aug. 11, 1862, RIHS. (The volumes of the journals are unpaginated.)
30. Providence Reform School, Fourteenth Annual Report, 9. The report does not name these thirteen, and I do not know whether Edward Bixby (inmate no. 575) was counted among them. Edward Bixby was one of the sons of Lydia Bixby, the recipient of a famous letter from Abraham Lincoln consoling her on the supposed deaths of her five sons while fighting for the Union. Edward Bixby did not, in fact, die in the war.
31. Ibid., July 17, 1861.
32. Ibid., July 21, 1862.
33. Mott actually enlisted in the army as a "substitute" for a draftee, a practice permitted at the time. Providence Reform School, Journal, vol. 1, July 27, 1863.
34. Mott, Benjamin E., 12-28-66, Reform School Letters; sentence punctuation added. (The school's letters were found bound into bundles, roughly by month and year, in a box at the Providence City Archives. We have transcribed and photographed all the letters and placed the images into

digital files coded by the name of the inmate and the date of the letter.)

35. Nutting, "The Poor," 481.
36. Ibid., 482.
37. Ibid., 483.
38. "Brutality Charges at Providence Reform School," *Narragansett Times and Washington County Advertiser*, Jan. 21, 1869.
39. "Adjourned Meeting of Catholic Citizens," *Providence Journal*, Sept. 21, 1868.
40. Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman [S.A.L.E.M., pseud.], "The Child of the State," *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1877, 334-47. See Jane Atteridge Rose, "Recovering Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman and 'The Child of the State,'" *Legacy* 7, no. 1 (1900): 39-43.
41. Isaac T. Hecker, "Public Charities," *The Catholic World* 17 (April 1873): 1-23.
42. The 1860 and 1870 federal censuses recorded the occupation, country of birth, and real and personal wealth of individuals (for example, in 1870 Thomas Cosgrove, a dry-goods merchant born in Ireland, possessed real wealth of \$400,000 and personal wealth of \$50,000).
43. *Providence Journal*, Mar. 1, 1869, editorial.
44. Providence Reform School, Journal, vol. 1, Jan. 12, 1861.
45. Ibid., Mar. 8, 1861.
46. Ibid., Aug. 7, 1861.
47. Ibid., vol. 2, July 23, 1872.
48. Hecker, "Public Charities," 7-13. Citing annual reports from the Children's Aid Society in New York, the New York Juvenile Society, and the Five Points House of Industry, Hecker refers to these "emigration systems" as a form of exile. By his estimates, "the average number of exiles per week [from the twenty-eight

charitable institutions in New York] is about two hundred, making about ten thousand every year" (p. 10).

49. This body, formally designated by the General Assembly as the Female Board of Visitors to Penal and Correctional Institutions, filed its annual reports as the Ladies' Board of Visitors (Acts and Resolves, May session, R.I. General Assembly, 1872). The board was also referred to as the Board of Female Visitors to Institutions Where Women Are Imprisoned and the Board of Women Visitors to the State Institutions Where Women and Children Are Imprisoned. In her letter of resignation from the board in 1876, Sarah E. H. Doyle referred to it as the Board of Lady Visitors to the Penal and Correctional Institutions of the State; the *Providence Journal*, which published the letter, referred to the board as the Women's Board of Visitors to the Penal and Correctional Institutions of the State.
50. The text of the legislation can be found in *The Public Statutes of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations* (Providence: E. L. Freeman & Co., 1882), 726.
51. Nutting, "The Poor," 483.
52. Providence Reform School, Journal, vol. 3, Sept. 27, 1875. In this incident several girls had stolen a pencil and paper to write notes to the boys. Talcott was trying to elicit the facts of the incident by using the rattan, maintaining that solitary confinement would have permitted the girls to conceal their act. Chace might have been guessing at Alice Murphy's age when she referred to her as "a girl 17 years old"; the 1875 census listed Alice Murphy's age as 19.
53. Providence Reform School, Reports, MSS 214, sg 3, ser. 1, vol. 4, Aug. 16, 1864, RIHS.
54. The earliest record to mention a placement for Alice Murphy is dated September 1864, when it appears she was sent to the Shaker community in

New Lebanon, N.Y. Although several children were indeed placed with the Shakers over the years, two facts raise doubt about the accuracy of the record in regard to Alice Murphy: first, it was highly unusual for an inmate to receive any external placement within the first month of incarceration; second, there is no record of Alice's return to the institution, and records are available that cover the years in question. She certainly was placed twice in 1867, once in Providence and once in Assonet, Mass. These placements evidently failed, but the records that would have covered her return and the circumstances involved are missing.

55. Providence Reform School, Reports, vol. 5, Apr. 21, 1868.
56. Providence Reform School, Journal, vol. 2, June 9, 1870.
57. Murphy, Alice, 03-15-70, Reform School Letters.
58. Providence Reform School, Journal, vol. 3, Aug. 9-10, 1873.
59. Ibid., Dec. 31, 1873, Jan. 2, 1874.
60. Ibid., Apr. 14, 15, 27, 1875.
61. Ibid., May 28, 29, 30, 31, 1875.
62. Ibid., July 25, 26, 1875.
63. Ibid., Sept. 25, 27, 1875.
64. Providence Reform School, vol. 6, Sept. 5, 1876, Jan. 16, 1877.
65. After asserting that the girls were subjected to brutal physical punishment, the fourth charge brought before the Providence Board of Aldermen claimed "more specially that all modesty and decency have been outraged by stripping them to the waist and lashing on the naked back; taking them from their beds and whipping them in their night dresses; tying their hands and feet and ducking them, and by other forms of punishment which no man should ever inflict on a woman." *Investigation*, 1:iv.
66. *Report of the Ladies' Board of Visitors to the Penal and Correctional Institutions of the State*, Public Document no. 3, Acts and Resolves, May session, General Assembly, 1872, p. 3.
67. Ibid., Public Document no. 3, Acts and Resolves, General Assembly, January 17, 1871, pp. 3-4.
68. Providence Reform School Journal, vol. 3, Sept. 27, 1875.
69. *Memorial of the Trustees of the Providence Reform School in Relation to the Report of the Board of Female Visitors to Institutions Where Women Are Imprisoned* (Providence: Providence Press Company, 1875).
70. Undated letter signed by Edwin Snow, Reform School Letters.
71. *Memorial*, 7-8.
72. Providence Reform School, Reports, vol. 5, Apr. 6, 1869.
73. Providence Reform School, Journal, vol. 2, Feb. 22, 23, 1872.
74. Providence Reform School, Reports, vol. 6, July 7, 1872.
75. Providence Reform School, Journal, vol. 3, July 30, 1873.
76. The latter two girls were arrested together in 1870, placed out on trial (separately) in Boston in 1873, and rearrested together in October 1874. Julia McGuinnis was determined to be pregnant in February 1875 and was placed under the custody of the Board of State Charities in Massachusetts; Rachel Cook served out her time in the Providence Reform School and was discharged in 1876 at the expiration of her sentence.
77. Providence Reform School, Journal, vol. 2, Sept. 8, 1871, Feb. 24, Oct. 31, Dec. 16, 1872, Jan. 6, 1873; vol. 3, Jan. 30, 1873, Sept. 9, 23, 1875; volume in Providence City Archives, July 28, 1877, Mar. 11, 1879.
78. Letter reprinted in Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 3, 1876-1885 (Rochester, N.Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1887), 345.
79. L. B. C. Wyman and A. C. Wyman, *Elizabeth Buffum Chace*, 2: 64-65.
80. Ibid., 66.
81. In 1870 Talcott noted in his journal that two frequent troublemakers, Maggie Garrick (no. 1354) and Cynthia Amidon (no. 1146), admitted conspiring to misbehave so they would "have something to tell the ladies." Providence Reform School Journal, vol. 2, Nov. 20, 1870.
82. Chace, Elizabeth B., 11-25-70, Reform School Letters.
83. Abby M. Chace, *Report of the Ladies' Board of Visitors to the Penal and Correctional Institutions of the State*, May 3, 1872, 3-4. The Industrial School for Girls at Lancaster opened in 1854 at a time when James M. Talcott served as superintendent of the boy's reform school at Westboro, Massachusetts.
84. Ibid., 4.
85. Nutting, "The Poor," 483, 485.

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and of William A. Steere, the author of "Four Years Prior to Signing the Declaration, R.I.'s Stephen Hopkins Declares His Slave's Independence," an unpublished manuscript.

Know all men by these presents that, I Stephen Hopkins of Providence in the County of Providence & State of Rhode Island, taking into Consideration the State and Circumstances of a certain Negro Man Named Saint Jago, who hath lived with me in the Quality of a Servant, or Slave, from his infancy till now, that he is about Thirty Three years Old. And Calling to mind that, he has always been a Very Honest and faithful Servant, and that, is duly Qualified to provide for, and take care of himself, in a State of Freedom. But, principally, and most of all finding, that the merciful and beneficent goodness of Almighty God, by the blessed Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord: hath by his blessed Spirit taught all, who honestly obey its Divine Dictates, that, the keeping any of his rational Creatures in Bondage, who are capable of taking care of, and providing for themselves in a State of Freedom, is altogether inconsistent with his Holy and Righteous Will. For these reasons, the last of which is only prevalent, I the said Stephen Hopkins Do, Manumit, Set Free, and Discharge, the said Saint Jago: And by these presents do, freely, fully, and absolutely, for my self, my Heirs, Executors, Administrators, and assigns, Manumit, Set Free, and Discharge, him the said Saint Jago: from every kind of Bondage, Servitude, or Dependence whatsoever. In Witness whereof, I have unto Set my Hand and Seal, the 28th Day of the Tenth Month called October Anno Dom 1772.

Signed Sealed and duly executed in presence of
Wm Barker
Step Hopkins

Stephen Hopkins freed Saint Jago Hopkins, his slave, with this 1772 document. Courtesy of Seth Kaller Inc.

A Slave Called Saint Jago

DONALD R. HOPKINS

My great-great-grandfather Lewis Hopkins was a ship carpenter who died at the age of forty in Nassau, the Bahamas, in 1850. Aside from the record of his death, the only extant records relating to him, all in Nassau, are those from the baptisms of his four children, born between 1834 and 1839 (the first baptized in 1835), and his marriage in 1843, with his name signed on the marriage record. I do not know where he came from, whether he was enslaved or free before all slaves in the British West Indies were emancipated in 1834, or how he acquired his surname. No slaveholders named Hopkins were listed in the triennial lists of slaves compiled in the Bahamas from 1822 to 1834, and I found no firm matches in the lists of "Liberated Africans" freed from slave ships by the British navy at Nassau, in rosters of the British West India regiments that served in Nassau, or in other records of manumitted former slaves in the Bahamas. His death occurred only months after the Bahamas began keeping civil records of births and deaths. My search for Lewis Hopkins's antecedents included visits to the Bahamian archives in Nassau and the British National Archives in suburban London, as well as reviews of church records of births, deaths, and marriages in the Bahamas before 1850 and records available on microfilm through the Family History Library of the Church of Latter-Day Saints. When these searches yielded no further information, I decided to pursue a possible connection that I had discounted earlier because I knew that my paternal DNA originated in Angola, not in Europe.

I now began looking for any possible connection to the brief capture of Nassau by Admiral Esek Hopkins in 1776. A twentieth-century painting by V. Zveg depicting the landing of Continental sailors and marines shows Hopkins's small squadron with some black crew

members.¹ I soon learned that Esek and his brother Stephen Hopkins of Providence owned slaves, and in my following investigation of Stephen Hopkins I discovered that he had owned a slave with the unusual name of Saint Jago.² The amount and substance of the information that I subsequently uncovered about Saint Jago's life so surprised and fascinated me that I decided to share his story in the hope that doing so might serve two purposes: it might connect me to someone who may know of more information to advance my personal search for Lewis Hopkins's origins, and it might encourage more research into the lives of black residents of eighteenth-century Rhode Island.

What follows is the story of what I learned about Saint Jago, a slave with the intriguing name of a Christian saint.

EMBARRASSED BY A PALSY that affected his arm, when sixty-nine-year-old Stephen Hopkins (1707-1785) signed the U.S. Declaration of Independence in 1776, he famously explained to onlookers, "My hand trembles, but my heart does not."³ Hopkins was an admired elder statesman and former governor who had also served Rhode Island as chief justice and as a member of the General Assembly, and he was now one of the colony's two delegates to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. He had begun his adult life as a rural farmer before moving his wife and six surviving children to Providence when he was thirty-five years old, establishing himself there as a successful merchant, shipbuilder, and investor, and a leading citizen of the colony.⁴ Four years before signing the Declaration, his palsy not as advanced, Hopkins had personally written out and signed a 250-word statement, dated October 28, 1772, and witnessed by William Barker, a Quaker, freeing his slave Saint Jago Hopkins:

Know all men by these presents that, I Stephen Hopkins of Providence in the County of Providence Esquire, taking into Consideration the State and Circumstances of a certain Negro Man Named Saint Jago, who hath lived with me in the Quality of a Servant, or Slave, from his infancy till now; that he is about Thirty Three years old. And calling to mind that, he has always been a very Honest and faithful servant, and that he is duly qualified to provide for, and take care of himself, in a State of Freedom. But, principally, and most of all finding, that the merciful and beneficent goodness of Almighty God; by the blessed Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord: hath by the blessed Spirit taught all, who honestly obey its Divine Dictates, that, the keeping of any of his rational Creatures in Bondage, who are capable of taking care of, and providing for themselves in a State of Freedom: is, altogether [sic] inconsistent with his Holy and Righteous Will. For these reasons; the last of which is only prevalent, I the said Stephen Hopkins do, Manumit, set Free, and discharge, the said Saint Jago: and by these presents do, freely, fully, and absolutely, for my self, my Heirs, Executors, Administrators, and assigns, manumit, set free, and discharge, him the said Saint Jago: from every kind of Bondage, Servitude, or dependence what-soever. In Witness whereof, I have unto set my Hand and Seal, the 28.th Day of the Tenth Month called October Anno Dom 1772.⁵

At least sixteen signers of the Declaration of Independence, including Hopkins, were slaveholders.⁶ Hopkins still owned six slaves two years after he freed Saint Jago.⁷ He arranged for freeing the remaining slaves in his will, dated May 20, 1781; the emancipations were to be carried out "immediately to those of age," with the other males to be freed at age twenty-one and the female(s) at age eighteen. His stepdaughter (and daughter-in-law) Ruth freed Toney Hopkins, who may have been the former governor's manservant, in 1786.⁸

Saint Jago Hopkins lived forty years as a free man, almost long enough to see slavery eliminated in Rhode Island. From its beginnings in the seventeenth century, slavery in Rhode Island reached its peak, with nearly 5,000 slaves, in the middle of the eighteenth century before the state acted to abolish it.⁹ For much of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Rhode Island was the center of slaving voyages from North America, and the Atlantic slave trade was a major commercial enterprise in Newport, Bristol, and

Providence, where many wealthy families used slaves as domestic servants or for other household chores, employed them in their commercial enterprises, or hired them out. In the southern part of Rhode Island, most slaves performed agricultural tasks on farms and plantations.¹⁰

About 17 percent of the 655 families in Providence owned slaves in 1774, with 52 of these 114 families owning one slave each. Stephen Hopkins was among the top 5 percent of slave owners with six or seven slaves.¹¹ As the first commodore of the Continental navy, Esek Hopkins led the daring raid that captured eighty-eight cannon and other badly needed supplies from British forces at Nassau, in the Bahamas, in March 1776. Before that, however, Esek had commanded a disastrous slaving voyage in 1764-65 on behalf of Providence entrepreneurs John, Joseph, Moses, and Nicholas Brown that delivered only 58 of its 167 captives alive after a slave uprising and an outbreak of disease during the Middle Passage from West Africa to the West Indies.¹²

The tide began turning against slave ownership during the 1770s, when more and more Rhode Islanders freed their slaves under the increasing exhortations of Quakers and other abolitionists, including Moses Brown, who had now become a fervent abolitionist in opposition to his brother John, who continued to trade in slaves. The Revolutionary War also presented new avenues to freedom for slaves in exchange for their enlistment to fight for either side in the conflict. In June 1774, two years after he freed Saint Jago, Stephen Hopkins secured passage of a bill in the General Assembly to prohibit the importation of slaves into Rhode Island. Hopkins justified the enactment in the bill's preamble: "Whereas, the inhabitants of America are generally engaged in the preservation of their own rights and liberties, among which that of personal freedom must be considered as the greatest; and as those who are desirous of enjoying all the advantages of liberty themselves, should be willing to extend

personal liberty to others, Therefore be it enacted . . ."¹³ Ten years later the General Assembly enacted a law declaring that all slaves born in the state after March 1, 1784, were to be set free, the males at age twenty-one and the females at age eighteen.¹⁴ Rhode Island's new law thus echoed what Stephen Hopkins decreed in his will three years earlier. By 1825 Rhode Island's African American population consisted of 1,414 free blacks and four elderly slaves.¹⁵

HOPKINS WAS BEING pressured to free his slaves by his fellow Quakers,¹⁶ but it is not clear why he freed only Saint Jago, and not his other slaves, in 1772. Moses Brown, also a Quaker and a political ally of Hopkins, freed all seven of his slaves, six of whom were eighteen years old or older, including the parent or parents of a two-year-old, in November 1773.¹⁷

Saint Jago's reported ability "to provide for, and take care of himself" as a free man was certainly a factor in his emancipation. Hopkins may have delayed freeing the others because he felt they could not take care of themselves.

In stating that Saint Jago was "about Thirty Three years old" in the October 1772 document freeing him, Hopkins was remembering that Saint Jago was about three years old when the Hopkins family moved to Providence in 1742. The manumission document says that Saint Jago had been Hopkins's slave "from [Saint Jago's] infancy," but it provides no details of when, where, or how Hopkins acquired him. Was Saint Jago born to a slave in Stephen Hopkins's household around 1739? Was his mother purchased or part of Sarah Scott's dowry when she married Hopkins in 1726? Was Saint Jago inherited from Hopkins's father

Stephen Hopkins's Providence home, originally on South Main Street at Hopkins (then called Bank) Street, has since been moved twice. It now stands at the corner of Hopkins and Benefit Streets. Photograph by the author.



William, who died in 1738? No slaves are mentioned in William Hopkins's will, dated June 11, 1738, in which he left his three older sons, including Stephen, only "five shillings each," because "I have given them sufficient already."¹⁸ When Stephen Hopkins was a nineteen-year-old farmer, his father gave him seventy acres of land and his grandfather gave him ninety acres, perhaps on the occasion of Stephen's marriage that year, and five years later Stephen purchased adjoining land.¹⁹ Stephen's father and grandfather may also have provided the young man with slaves to work on the farmland, or Stephen himself may have purchased slaves, one of whom was Saint Jago's mother.

Saint Jago's name, which was highly unusual for a slave in the English-speaking colonies of North America, may be an important clue to his origin. Various rendered during his lifetime as "Saint Jago," "St. Jago," "Sant," "Sante," or "Santealger" Hopkins, his given name is the Portuguese (Sant Jago) or Spanish (Santiago) name for Saint James. By 1739 the African populations in some coastal areas of Central Africa that are now part of Angola had been exposed to Portuguese explorers, missionaries, merchants, and slave traders for more than a century, and many of the area's inhabitants had become Roman Catholics and adopted other cultural traits from the Portuguese, having their children baptized and giving them Christian names.²⁰ Often included with their neighbors as "Congoes" by slave traders, Central Africans were a large part of those transported to the Americas during the Atlantic slave trade. While not certain, it seems likely that either or both of Saint Jago Hopkins's parents, transplanted to Rhode Island, were from one such Portuguese-influenced area of Angola. Saint Jago may have been given his name because he was born on Saint Jago's Feast Day, July 25. Although almost all slave ships originating in Rhode Island purchased slaves on the coast of West Africa, which was much easier to reach from New England than Angola because of distance and prevailing winds, at least a few Angolan slaves were imported into Rhode

Island from Barbados, and others were transported by Dutch traders to Manhattan and distributed from there to parts of New England.²¹

NOT MUCH IS KNOWN about Saint Jago's life as a slave, but Stephen Hopkins is reputed to have been a "humane" and "easy and affectionate" master.²² It is known, however, that ten years before Saint Jago was freed, he was part of a crew who served on a privateer schooner, the *Blackbird*, that was commissioned by then governor Stephen Hopkins on May 1, 1762, during the French and Indian War and was officially authorized to attack and capture any vessels or shipping affiliated with France or Spain. The twenty-ton schooner was commanded by William Metcalf.²³ In 1789 Saint Jago would identify himself as a rigger, a worker fitting the ropes and chains used to support the masts and control the sails of ships. It was a demanding skill that would have provided him with a livelihood as a free man, working in a shipyard, on the docks, or at sea, but it may or may not have been his job on the *Blackbird* during a voyage that was cut short by an unexpected event.

Accompanied by the *Blackbird*'s doctor, Edward Hoare, and the boatswain, Israel Potter, William Metcalf appeared before notary public Henry Paget in Providence on September 30, 1762, and swore an affidavit declaring

that being at anchor at the island of Avis [Aves, off the Caribbean coast of Venezuela] came on board him with his tender one Thomas Stevenson commander of the privateer brig called the York Shire Hunter commissioned from Antigua (and notwithstanding said Metcalf produced him, his commission from the governor of this colony) he seized upon his vessel and cargo by open violence darning his commission as good for nothing, and carried him along side his brig, and put the goods into said tender, and took him the said Metcalf on board the brig, and most of his officers and people, and there detained them all night, but in the morning, thought proper to return most of the goods, except to the value of about five hundred pounds sterling together with the said schooner, and further these deponents say, that he the said Stevenson, abused one of said Metcalf's hands in a cruel manner and finally detained four of said Metcalf's

hands which obliged the said Metcalf to brake up his cruise, and make the best of his way home to this port where he arrived yesterday evening.²⁴

It is not known whether Saint Jago was one of the four detained crew members or, if he was, how long he was detained. If this was Saint Jago's only maritime voyage, it was not for lack of potential opportunities. Stephen Hopkins himself once described the colony of Rhode Island as a "nursery of seamen," and he and his brother Esek and their families were prominent participants in all aspects of Rhode Island's maritime activity, building, outfitting, commanding, and crewing merchant ships, privateers, naval vessels, and slave ships.²⁵

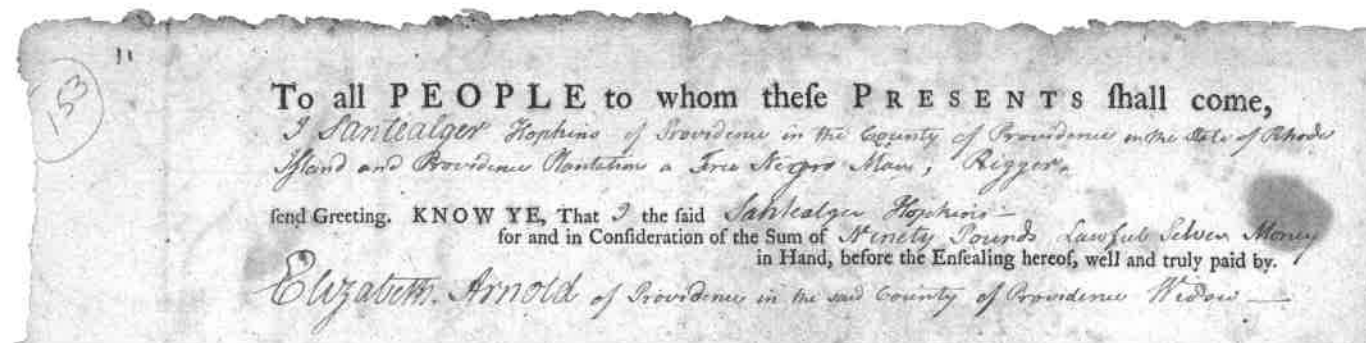
In 1770, while serving as the chancellor of Rhode Island College (later renamed Brown University for its support by the Brown family), Stephen Hopkins had a slave deliver rum to the slaves, free blacks, indentured servants, and white workmen who were building the school's "College Edifice" (now University Hall) a short distance from his home.²⁶ Saint Jago is not named in the account ledger that details expenses for

the construction, but one wonders whether he was one of the construction workers or watched others at work on the building.

AFTER FOUR YEARS as a free man, Saint Jago Hopkins, then about thirty-nine years old, married Rose King on July 10, 1778, at the Congregational Church "on the West Side of the river" in Providence.²⁷ Earlier that year the State of Rhode Island had paid Saint Jago well for transporting guns, bayonets, cartridge boxes, and other military supplies and freight from Bristol and Howland's Ferry to Providence, presumably by boat—a significant and risky responsibility during the Revolutionary War effort.²⁸ On October 27 of that year he purchased a house in Providence from John Dawson.²⁹ A census in 1782 recorded two blacks in Saint Jago's household; his household had increased to six persons by the time of the first U.S. census in 1790, then declined to four persons by 1800 and three or four persons by 1810 (when an inexplicable double listing for "Sant Hopkins" appeared in the census).³⁰

Providence Jan. 31. 1778.
 1.10
 17.10
 15/5 State of Rhode Island Dr.
 930/75 To Sant Hopkins
 3.15- For freight of 310 ^{Guns} with 126 Bayonets.
 104. Cartridge Boxes from
 Bristol Ferry to Providence
 @ 35 Dollars.

The State of Rhode Island recorded the payment of thirty-five dollars to Sant Hopkins for transporting military supplies from Bristol Ferry to Providence during the Revolutionary War. Rhode Island State Archives.



When Saint Jago Hopkins and his wife, Abigail, sold half of their Providence house in 1789, the deed identified Santealger Hopkins as "a Free Negro Man, Rigger" (top). Each signed the deed with an X (bottom). Shepley Collection, MSS 9006, 10:153; RIHS Collection (RHi X1 7505).

According to a letter from Amasa Gray to Moses Brown, sometime in 1785 a dispute arose between Saint Jago Hopkins and one of Moses's former slaves, Bonno Brown, over where to place a fence between their properties. The letter states that "this is not the first difference that they have had."³¹ In January 1789 a Stephen Hopkins (who may or may not have been related to the former governor, who died in 1785) wrote to tell Moses Brown that he would call on him the next day, "as I am about exchanging Sants part

of the house for another and it is necessary that an agreement be made between Sant and Bono."³² By March 1789 Saint Jago and his wife Abigail sold one-half of their house and land in Providence to Bonno Brown (whether Saint Jago's former wife, Rose King, had died or whether the marriage had ended in divorce is unknown). A month later "Santealger" ("a Free Negro Man, Rigger") and Abigail Hopkins both signed a deed with an "X" to transfer ownership of the other half of the house to Elizabeth Arnold, a widow.³³

At her death in 1820, reportedly aged "upwards of 90," a woman named Phebe Brown was identified as the "widow of Bonno (colored)" and as having been "many years a servant in Gov. Hopkin's family."³⁴ The shared service of Saint Jago and Phebe Brown as slaves of Stephen Hopkins might possibly have had a bearing on the enmity between Bonno Brown and Saint Jago Hopkins. Bonno Brown was one of the slaves who had been freed by Moses Brown in November 1773, when Moses also "renounced his claim to three slaves whom he held in common with his brothers."³⁵ The oldest of Moses's slaves, Bonno was thirty-four years old (approximately the same age as Saint Jago) when he was emancipated a year after Saint Jago.

In 1798 a serious marital conflict between Saint Jago and Abigail became public when "Sante" Hopkins published a notice in the *Providence Gazette and Country Journal* announcing that he would not be responsible for any future debts incurred by his wife, since she "has conducted herself in a very unbecoming Manner."³⁶ But they remained married, and in his will, dated December 15, 1811, Saint Jago named his wife Abigail and his five children—Samuel, Amos, Rosannah, Elizabeth, and Sally—as beneficiaries.³⁷

When he died in 1812 at about the age of seventy-three, Saint Jago Hopkins owned another house and land, one-half of which he bequeathed to his oldest son, Samuel; the other half was to be shared equally among the other four children, with Abigail having the use of the half of the house bequeathed to Samuel's siblings so long as she remained unwed.³⁸ The will, which Saint Jago signed with an "X" and in which he states his occupation as "laborer," was probated on July 6, 1812. In an action that was uncommon for a black person in Providence at the time, Samuel, who was named the sole executor of his father's estate, placed a public notice in three successive issues of the *Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, the town's weekly newspaper that Governor Stephen Hopkins had cofounded in 1762. The first notice appeared in the issue dated Saturday, July 25, 1812, Saint Jago's feast day:

NOTICE is hereby given, that the subscriber has been duly appointed Executor of the last Will and Testament of SAINT HOPKINS, late of the town of Providence, in the County of Providence (black man) deceased, and has taken upon himself that Trust, by giving Bond as the Law directs, All Persons therefore having Demands upon the Estate of said Deceased are requested to exhibit the same, and all Persons indebted to said Estate are called on to make immediate Payment to SAMUEL HOPKINS, Executor.³⁹

IT SEEMS SOMEHOW FITTING that the first public notice for settling Saint Jago Hopkins's estate should appear on his namesake's feast day. Born into chattel slavery, mastering a respected trade, and becoming a self-sufficient property owner after his manumission, Saint Jago Hopkins had a long and exceptional life. This brief account is intended to reveal a real person rather than a virtually anonymous slave behind a curious name. No doubt there were many other bondsmen and bondswomen whose life stories would be well worth retrieving from the shadows of history.

I have since begun working with Cherry Fletcher Bamberg, FASG, to learn more about as many of Stephen Hopkins's slaves and their immediate descendants as possible. The 2009 brochure for visitors to the Governor Stephen Hopkins House in Providence names "slaves who made a home here—Fibbo [Phebe], St. Jago, Primus [Prime], Adam, Prince and St. Jago Jr." St. Jago, Primus, and Prince Hopkins were listed as free black heads of households in the censuses of 1782 or 1790, and Phebe was the wife of Bonno Brown, but I have found no other reference to Adam. The brochure's reference to St. Jago Jr., if correct, might explain the above-mentioned double listing of Sant Hopkins in Providence in the 1810 U.S. census. Perhaps St. Jago Jr. was an out-of-wedlock product of Saint Jago's long bachelorhood, and perhaps Saint Jago had other children who left Providence or who died before reaching adulthood. Whether any of these men was the father or grandfather of Lewis Hopkins of Nassau remains, for now, a mystery.⁴⁰

For more information and educational materials on this subject, see under Education at www.rihs.org

Notes

1. See www.history.navy.mil/photos/images/h79000/h7941k.jpg.
2. Cherry Fletcher Bamberg, FASG, has discovered additional records, not included here, for an article we are preparing on several of Stephen Hopkins's slaves and their descendants.
3. Denise Kiernan and Joseph D'Agnese, *Signing Their Lives Away* (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2009), 52.
4. For summaries of Stephen Hopkins's life, see John Sanderson, *Biography of the Signers to the Declaration of Independence* (Philadelphia: R. W. Pomeroy, 1824), vol. 6, and William E. Foster, "Stephen Hopkins, a Rhode Island Statesman," *Rhode Island Historical Tracts*, no. 19 (Providence: Sidney S. Rider, 1884).
5. A photograph of the framed manumission document and transcription of the text may be viewed online at www.sethkaller.net/catalogs/African-american/47-historical/212-stephen-hopkins-slave, or by searching "Saint Jago Hopkins."
6. According to Kiernan and D'Agnese in *Signing Their Lives Away*, the following men were slaveholders: William Whipple of New Hampshire; Stephen Hopkins of Rhode Island; William Floyd, Francis Lewis, and Lewis Morris of New York; Benjamin Franklin and James Wilson of Pennsylvania; Charles Carroll of Maryland; Carter Braxton, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Nelson Jr., and George Wythe of Virginia; Thomas Heyward Jr., Thomas Lynch Jr., and Arthur Middleton of South Carolina; and Button Gwinnett of Georgia.
7. Cherry Fletcher Bamberg, "1774 Census of Rhode Island: Providence," *Rhode Island Roots* 31 (2005): 73. The house where Stephen Hopkins and his family and slaves lived from 1743 until his death is now located at the corner of Benefit and Hopkins Streets in Providence. The house is preserved as a museum and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
8. For the will, search "William Hopkins will 1738" on the Internet. For Toney's emancipation by Ruth Hopkins, see Rhode Island Historical Society MSS 9004, vol. 1, p. 57.
9. William G. McLoughlin, *Rhode Island: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 105-6.
10. Charles Rappleye, *Sons of Providence: The Brown Brothers, the Slave Trade, and the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); Thomas N. DeWolf, *Inheriting the Trade* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008); Christy M. Nadalin, "The Last Years of the Rhode Island Slave Trade," *Rhode Island History* 54 (1996): 35-49.
11. John R. Bartlett, *1774 Census of Rhode Island* (Providence: Knowles, Anthony & Co., 1858); Bamberg, "1774 Census," 66-82.
12. Malcolm Harcourt Jr., "The Taking of the Bahamas by the Continental Navy in 1776," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 49 (1925): 349-66; Alverda S. Beck and William D. Miller, *The Correspondence of Esek Hopkins* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1933); Charles H. Miller, *Admiral Number One* (New York: William-Frederick Press, 1962); Rappleye, *Sons of Providence*, 53-74.
13. Sanderson, *Biography*, 6:243-44.
14. Linda L. Mathew, "Manumissions in Providence, 1784-1800," *Rhode Island Roots* 32 (2006): 193-96.
15. Rowena Stewart, "Blacks in Rhode Island: A Heritage Discovered," 1976, VF Subj. A258, Rhode Island Historical Society.
16. Foster, "Stephen Hopkins," pt. 2, p. 247.
17. Rappleye, *Sons of Providence*, 133.
18. Foster, "Stephen Hopkins," pt. 2, pp. 236-37.
19. Sanderson, *Biography*, 6:226-27.
20. Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 169, 272.
21. John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 154, 159.
22. Writing a century later, Foster ("Stephen Hopkins," pt. 2, pp. 99-100) says that "In the letters of Governor Hopkins and of other members of his family, there are occasional references to some valued family servant, and always in a tone of affectionate regard," but the author gives no details or specific citations. According to Sanderson (*Biography*, 6:253), Stephen Hopkins "governed his children and domestics in an easy and affectionate manner." I have found no relevant letters by Hopkins's family members or testimony of any of the slaves.
23. The *Blackbird* was armed with four carriage and eight swivel guns, and it bore a name used to refer unfavorably to black captives. Howard W. Preston, *Rhode Island and the Sea* (Providence: Rhode Island State Bureau of Information, 1932), 96. For the meaning of "blackbird," see McLoughlin, *Rhode Island*, 107. As commander of the *Middleton* the year before, Metcalf had carried slaves from the Bight of Biafra to Guadeloupe in the West Indies (www.slavevoyages.org: voyage ID#90934). Along with Saint Jago, four other men among the twenty-man crew of the *Blackbird* were probably slaves, receiving no share of the proceeds from the voyage; in Saint Jago's case, such proceeds were probably paid to Stephen Hopkins. Prize Shares of Privateer *Blackbird*, Esten Papers, MSS 408, box 1 (1762), Rhode Island Historical Society.
24. Notarized Statement by William Metcalf, Esten Papers, MSS 408, vol. 1, p. 8 (1762), Rhode Island Historical Society.
25. Howard Preston, "Rhode Island and the Sea," 69. Preston also lists letters of marque that were issued for four different vessels commanded by Esek, William, Christopher, and John Hopkins (the *Winthrop*, *Prince Frederick*, *Prince George*, and *Reprisal* respectively) from 1741 to 1745. William Foster ("Stephen Hopkins," pt. 1, pp. 99-100) says that in a list of Providence vessels compiled by Moses Brown, 17 of the 79 "are either owned or commanded by various members of the Hopkins family, and in still other instances Stephen Hopkins' interest may be traced," and that three of Governor Hopkins's sons "appear as captains" of merchant ships or privateers. Esek Hopkins Jr., a midshipman, was aboard his father's flagship *Alfred*, which led the eight Continental navy vessels that attacked Nassau in 1776; another of Esek's sons, John B. Hopkins, was captain of the *Cabot*, and a William Hopkins was master on the *Providence*, both vessels also participating in the attack. See Edward Field, *Esek Hopkins* (Providence: E. L. Freeman & Sons, 1898), 107, 109, 120.
26. Robert P. Emlen, "Slave Labor at the College Edifice: Building Brown University's University Hall in 1770," *Rhode Island History* 66 (2008): 41.
27. James N. Arnold, *Vital Records of Rhode Island, 1636-1850* (Providence: Narragansett Historical Pub. Co., 1891), 10:210.
28. Military Papers, Revolutionary War, Rhode Island Archives, 15:64, 66; 16:15 (p. 20), 21(p. 19).
29. Deed, Santealger Hopkins to Elizabeth Arnold, Shepley Collection, MSS 9006, 10:153, Rhode Island Historical Society.
30. Jay M. Holbrook, *Rhode Island Census, 1782* (Oxford, Mass.: Holbrook Research Institute, 1979), 65; 1790 U.S. Federal Census, Rhode Island, Providence County, 174; 1800 U.S.

Federal Census, Rhode Island, Providence County, 216; 1810 U.S. Federal Census, Rhode Island, Providence County, 340, 348.

31. Letter, Amasa Gray to Moses Brown, Moses Brown Papers (Papers of the American Slave Trade, series A, part 1) reel 5, Rhode Island Historical Society.

32. Stephen Hopkins to Moses Brown, Jan. 26, 1789, Moses Brown Papers (Papers of the American Slave Trade, series A, part 1), reel 6, Rhode Island Historical Society.

33. Deed, Santealger Hopkins to Elizabeth Arnold.

34. Arnold, *Vital Records*, 20:616.

35. Rappleye, *Sons of Providence*, 56, 133.

36. Maureen A. Taylor, *Runaways, Deserters, and Notorious Villains, from Rhode Island Newspapers*, vol. 1, *The Providence Gazette, 1762-1800* (Camden, Maine: Picton Press, 1994), 163. I am indebted to Cherry Fletcher Bamberg for this reference.

37. US/CAN microfilm no. 0915011; 1805-1815 Wills, Providence, R.I., vol. 2 (1811-1815), 124-26; Family History Library of the Church of Latter-Day Saints.

38. US/CAN microfilm no. 0915011.

39. *Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, July 25, 1812, p. 3. The same notice appeared on page 1 of the issue dated August 1, 1812, and on page 4 of the issue dated August 8. I have not discovered where Saint Jago Hopkins is buried.

40. I do not know if I am related to Saint Jago Hopkins, but a chance encounter with Jeffrey Howe during my visit to the Rhode Island Historical Society Library in May 2009 alerted me to a black seaman from Providence, also named Lewis Hopkins, who disappeared from Rhode Island records after sailing from Providence and being captured and detained with his fellow crewmates in Spain late in 1812. My ancestor Lewis Hopkins

was about twenty-six years younger than the seaman Lewis Hopkins of Providence, whose seaman's protection certificate names his father as Prime Hopkins, another of Stephen Hopkins's slaves (Primus), who was freed in 1788. U.S. Customs House Providence Crew Lists, 1812, MSS 28, sgl, series 13, subseries A, box 3, folder 68, Rhode Island Historical Society; for the seaman's protection certificate, see Jeffrey Howe, "Black and Indian Sailors from Rhode Island," *Rhode Island Roots* 32 (2006): 205.

ORIGINAL
TO BE GIVEN TO
THE PERSON NATURALIZED

No. 7445573

Petition No. 19069

Personal description of holder as of date of naturalization: Date of birth November 22, 1886 sex female
complexion dark color of eyes brown color of hair grey height 5 feet 0 inches
weight 210 pounds; visible distinctive marks none
Marital status married former nationality Italian

I certify that the description above given is true, and that the photograph affixed hereto is a likeness of me.

Eliza Brunetti
(Complete and true signature of holder)

Commonwealth of Massachusetts ss:
County of Worcester }
Be it known, that at a term of the Superior Court of
Massachusetts
held pursuant to law at Worcester, Massachusetts
on March 16, 1956 the Court having found that
Eliza Brunetti
then residing at 20 King Street, East Blackstone, Mass.
intends to reside permanently in the United States (when so required by the
Naturalization Laws of the United States), had in all other respects complied with
the applicable provisions of such naturalization laws, and was entitled to be
admitted to citizenship, thereupon ordered that such person be and (she was
admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.
In testimony whereof the seal of the court is hereunto affixed this 16th
day of March in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and
and fifty-six and of our Independence the one hundred
and eightieth

Eliza Brunetti
Seal

It is a violation of the R.I. Code (and
punishable as such) to copy, print, photograph,
or otherwise illegally use this certificate.

By James Clerk of the Superior Court
Deputy Clerk

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Eliza Brunetti's certificate of naturalization, 1956; courtesy of Doris
Chamberland.

Going to Work

Teaching History with Primary Documents

C. MORGAN GREFE

In 2005 the Rhode Island Historical Society, with the support of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, began a project to explore the histories of the myriad ethnic groups who came to the Blackstone Valley in the twentieth century. At the outset the staff decided that the final product for this project would be a new permanent exhibit to be housed at our Museum of Work & Culture in Woonsocket. This is a museum dedicated to the lives and work of people in this region, with a focus that had long been on the story of French Canadian immigrants and factory work. The new project was devised to bring people from various groups throughout the valley, on both the Rhode Island and Massachusetts sides, into our museum—on the walls and in person.

To develop our exhibit, *Going to Work: Twentieth Century Settlers in the Blackstone Valley*, we drew on examples of what was done by people from the Mass. Memories Road Show (a statewide digital humanities project based at the University of Massachusetts, Boston) and the Little Compton Historical Society. We made the decision that this would not be an object-based exhibit but an image- and story-based one that needed people from all over the region to come forward and share their materials with us, which we would scan and hand back to them. We would also gather oral histories to complement the documentary evidence that people shared, as well as to make personal and individual the broader stories seen in historical and sociological texts. Thanks to the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities and the Corridor Commission, we were able to hold “Collection Events” to begin this process. Still more material was gathered in private sessions with individual families and institutions.

ONE OF THE MOST VALUABLE things that *Going to Work* has afforded us is a virtual collection of family photographs and documents. Saved by individuals and families for generations, the documents became the core of our exhibit. Additionally, they can serve an even wider and deeper function in classrooms in Rhode Island and across the nation as educational tools to help make history come to life as students begin to develop historical empathy through the personal stories of citizens.

The document shown here is the front of a certificate of naturalization issued by the United States to a sixty-nine-year-old woman named Eliza Brunetti. This certificate is an example of the type of document that historians use to do their work in understanding the past. Examining this particular document, a historian could infer multiple and diverse facts about the woman pictured and place her story and the document into a broad context of historical topics, such as twentieth-century immigration, New England ethnic communities, and labor history. The capacity to do this, however, is a learned skill, and one that we cannot expect students to have readily available without much practice and patience.

Sam Wineburg, an expert on how people learn and understand history, writes in his book *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001, pp. 8-9) that students might competently describe what they see on a document, but even the very best students will stop short of asking many critical questions about it. Such students invariably will fall back on prior knowledge and “presentist” thinking (judging historical actions by modern standards) that will keep them from being

able to draw correct conclusions about the document and the historical event it represents. Historians, even if they are involved in a far removed field, will ask certain kinds of questions of a document that reveal its useful meaning, something that students will not ordinarily do.

It is important for students to remember that a primary document is just one piece of information, and while it now exists and informs us about the past, it also existed in a context, it was created for a reason, and it was saved for yet another reason. Teachers must therefore be wary of using too many primary sources without adequately presenting secondary materials. Students need to understand the context for a document before they can move towards comprehension of the complexity of its historical moment or the contingency of related factors.

What, then, are good ways for students to look at a document so that they actually see what it has to offer? If possible, two copies should be given to each student, one copy to be kept clean and the other to be used as the “working” document. Students are conditioned not to write in their textbooks, so it is useful to give them permission to write directly on the latter copy and on a primary document worksheet, such as those available through the Library of Congress or the National Archives online. The technology to scan and make high-quality copies of documents is useful in this regard, but it is always a good reminder that original documents are not to be written upon!

How should students examine Eliza Brunetti’s certificate of naturalization? Students should first be asked to read the whole document with several questions in mind about its origins and use, but without trying to fill in any answers on their worksheets. The students should then read it again, this time with a pencil in hand, underlining and circling points of significance, and writing down answers about the document’s source (the United States government), its subject (naturalization of Eliza Brunetti), its audience (the new citizen and those who need to

verify her citizenship status), its provenance (1956 Worcester, Massachusetts), and its rhetorical tone (legally authoritative).

Students might also be asked to examine immigration laws and processes over time and to place this document within that context. Did Brunetti immigrate to the U.S. in the 1920s or in the 1930s, after the 1929 National Origins Act was passed and a ceiling was placed on immigrants from southern and eastern Europe? If she did come to the U.S. decades earlier, why did she wait until 1956 to become a citizen? Did she have to become a citizen? Why would some people choose to become citizens and others not to? Did everyone have equal access to the citizenship process? Why did Brunetti not yet have a social security number?

Even Brunetti’s signature might suggest pertinent questions: Is it the handwriting of a woman who learned to read and write later in life so that she could become a citizen, is it the pained script of a woman who had been laboring in factories along the Blackstone for her entire adult life, or is it both?

Perhaps Brunetti was a more recent arrival, coming as part of the 1948 Displaced Persons Act that allowed 400,000 people displaced by World War II into the United States. Maybe she was one of the final people processed at Ellis Island before the immigration facility there closed in 1954. Maybe she entered through the Port of Providence, one of the nation’s busiest points of immigration in the mid-twentieth century. Would she have studied for her citizenship test and learned that until the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 she could have been barred from naturalization if she had been of an “undesirable race,” and that in 1956 she still could not become an American if she had ever been a Communist or a Nazi?

Dealing with questions like these in examining Brunetti’s naturalization certificate, students do not learn only about the history of immigration, nor do they merely speculate about Brunetti’s past; they are also given an opportunity to better understand how

America saw itself in an official sense. Why does the certificate state the year in two ways, “in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and fifty-six and of our Independence the one hundred and eightieth,” and is that still being done? Why is it that immigration was once within the U.S. Treasury Department, but by 1956 it fell under the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice and is now supervised of the Department of Homeland Security?

Once the students have gone through the document answering questions such as these, they might be asked to go through it another time, now asking their own questions. Wineburg, and others who study cognition in historical thinking, note that the process of asking such questions activates prior knowledge while allowing students to feel comfortable about not having all of the answers. This practice allows students time to see the document in front of them and organize their thoughts about it (some of which will be disjointed at this point) rather than simply memorizing its contents; memorization is rarely the end result for historians.

Many of the answers to the students’ questions, such as “Why is the seal missing on this piece of paper?” will be easily found. Others, however, may be answerable only through a broader understanding of what was going on in the Blackstone River Valley, the United States, and even the world when the document was created. Such document-analysis questions permit

students to develop a more complete set of facts from which to begin forming their interpretations. Having students pursue this kind of inquiry is an excellent way for them to develop research skills both in libraries and online.

IF A TEACHER WOULD like to ask his or her class to begin interpreting immigration history of the twentieth century, the Eliza Brunetti naturalization certificate alone will not suffice. Lesson plans and other documents are readily available online, and this featured document will provide a local complement to what can be found in other resources.

The Brunetti certificate is a wonderful tool to get students excited and engaged in working with primary documents, but it is merely one piece of the story. Like most historical documents, Eliza Brunetti’s certificate of naturalization presents us with far more questions than answers. These questions offer valuable learning opportunities for both students and teachers—opportunities to connect with the local and national past, to consider the present, and to contemplate the future—all while examining the sweet face of a sixty-nine-year-old woman who, at that moment, was becoming an American.

For more information and educational materials on this subject, see under Education at www.rihs.org.

Rhode Island Book Notes

A Selection of Recent Titles

Edward Achorn, *Fifty-Nine in '84: Old Hoss Radbourn, Barehanded Baseball, and the Greatest Season a Pitcher Ever Had* (Harper Collins/Smithsonian Books, 2010).

This volumes chronicles the achievement of Providence Grays pitcher Charles “Old Hoss” Radbourn, who won fifty-nine games during the 1884 major league baseball season, a record that has never been equaled.

Patrick T. Conley, ed., *Constitution Day: Reflections by Respected Scholars* (Rhode Island Publications Society, 2010).

A collection of essays on the federal Constitution, originally presented as talks at Constitution Day observances organized in Rhode Island by the editor. Several of the essays concern Rhode Island’s connection to the Constitution, and the editor has provided brief commentaries relating developments in Rhode Island to the subject of each essay.

Patrick T. Conley, *Rhode Island's Founders: From Settlement to Statehood* (History Press, 2010).

Fifty-six biographical sketches of people who were influential in the founding and settlement of Rhode Island. All the subjects are inductees in the Rhode Island Hall of Fame, of which the author serves as president. A bibliographical essay is included.

D. Kurt Graham, *To Bring The Law Home: The Federal Judiciary in Early National Rhode Island* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2010).

A scholarly study of the early federal judiciary in Rhode Island—circuit and district courts—in the early years of the Republic. This study demonstrates that the federal courts exerted a nationalizing influence on Rhode Island’s citizens, who had reluctantly joined the federal union at its inception.

Cheryl Hackett, *Newport Shingle Style*, with photographs by Kindra Clineff and an introduction by Richard Guy Wilson (Frances Lincoln, 2010).

A photographic essay, with text. Fifteen houses are featured in the volume, with commentary on the history, influences, and evolution of the shingle-style home.

Myra B. Young Armstead, *Lord, Please Don't Take Me in August: African-Americans in Newport and Saratoga Springs, 1870-1930* (University of Illinois Press, 1999; reprint, 2006).

This volume shows how life in the resort towns of Newport, R.I., and Saratoga Springs, N.Y., uniquely shaped the African American experience.