

# RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

VOL. 11, NO. 4

ENGLISH ELM  
[see inside front cover]

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ISSUED QUARTERLY AT PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

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ENGLISH ELM

Photograph by Laurence E. Tilley

[reproduced on front cover]

*The fine English elm tree illustrated on the cover is an excellent representative of the most stately of European elms. It stands on the Society's lawn at the corner of Benefit and Charles Field streets and was planted about 1790, as has been determined by borings made by the Bartlett Tree Company.*

*The interest in the elms on the Society's property has been demonstrated by the response of our members to a recent appeal for contributions to be used for preserving these trees and protecting them from disease. Up to the present a fifth of the Society's membership has made donations to the tree fund. This is the largest number ever to reply to a similar appeal and includes many persons who live outside Rhode Island.*

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## THE PROVIDENCE MARKET HOUSE AND ITS NEIGHBORHOOD

by JOHN HUTCHINS CADY, F.A.I.A.

THE EARLY TOWN of Providence was developed along the Towne street which followed the course of the present South Main and North Main streets from Wickenden to Olney. For most of its length the street ran parallel to the shore at an elevation a few feet above tidewater. A gravelly beach extended from Mile End Cove (where three-way signal lights now control traffic jams east of Point Street Bridge) northerly to the mouth of Moshassuck River at Smith Street. On the westerly shore Weybosset Point projected into the stream near the present intersection of Westminster Street and Washington Row. Below the point the marshy shore of Providence River followed approximately the lines of Pine and Eddy streets; and north of it the waters of the cove, fed by Woonasquatucket River from the west and Moshassuck River from the north, covered the present Exchange Place, Memorial Square and the railroad property.

The home lots were located on the inland side of the Towne street, and the farms were on the west side of the river beyond Weybosset Point. "Passing to & from the Towne side to Wayboysett side," according to the records of a town meeting in 1704, was made by "Cannoos & Boates, Rideing & Carting & Swimming over of Cattell from side to side."<sup>1</sup> As early as 1660 a trestle bridge was erected,<sup>2</sup> but for want of proper maintenance it became impassable after a few years and eventually was washed away.

The next bridge, erected in 1711, was fourteen feet wide and ran "from the Towne side of the salt water . . . begining against ye west End of the lott whereon Daniell Abbott his dwelling house [now 20

<sup>1</sup>*The Early Records of the Town of Providence* (Providence, 1892-1915), v. 11, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 2, p. 130.

Market Square] standeth, & so cross the water unto the hill called Waybosset,"<sup>3</sup> near the present Turks Head. From that point a country road followed an old Indian trail along the present Weybosset and Broad streets to Pawtuxet, with another road branching to Plainfield, Connecticut.

Market Square had its origin in 1738, in which year a highway was laid out by order of the town council "from the Town street westward: Down to the salt water River: Where the Greate Bridge now standeth that Goeth over the River to Waybaset: taking in the old Town wharfe: Beginning att the north East Corner of Col. Abbots still house and from thence . . . 123: foot to a white stone stuck in: the Ground: being also a Corner of Col. Abbots Land."<sup>4</sup> The Towne street, already a century old, was closely built up with houses along its east border; and on its west border, extending down to the river, were the lots on which shops, distilleries, warehouses, wharves, and a few dwellings were erected. From the Towne street, nearly opposite the Abbott Still House, Rosemary Lane (now College Street) ran up the hillside to the Congregational church (southeast corner of College and Benefit), erected in 1723. The town wharf, just south of the bridge, was a mooring for fishing craft and a hangout for venders of fish and lobsters.

The "great bridge," as it was called, was used principally by the farmers who brought their produce to town from the agricultural lands on Weybosset side. Following its replacement by a new bridge, financed by a lottery in 1744,<sup>5</sup> a hayward was set up near its easterly abutment thereby establishing the area as a market center, commonly known as the Market Place. This bridge was carried away in the great storm of October 24, 1761, and was rebuilt<sup>6</sup> and opened in 1764, nearly double the width of the original structure, at the expense of the colony. A few years later a lottery was conducted for building a draw in the bridge, permitting vessels from the West Indies to dock as far north as Bowen Street.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 11, p. 91.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 9, p. 78. The Abbott Still House was erected ca. 1730 at a spot straddling the present northwest corner of South Main and College streets. It is not to be confused with Abbott's dwelling cited above.

<sup>5</sup>John R. Bartlett, *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island . . .* (Providence, 1856-1865), v. 5, p. 100. Hereafter cited as *R.I.C.R.*

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 6, p. 294.

<sup>7</sup>William R. Staples, *Annals of the Town of Providence . . .* (Providence, 1843), p. 205.

In 1762 the Colony House was erected east of the Towne street, one-quarter mile north of the bridge, and in a shop on the opposite side of the street Postmaster William Goddard commenced publication of the *Providence Gazette* in the same year. Before the new bridge was erected the Abbott Still House was acquired by Judge Jenckes who converted it for business purposes and opened a shop on the ground floor. The *Gazette* was published on the second story from 1763 until 1765 when the printing office was again moved to the vicinity of the Colony House (100 North Main Street). John Carter acquired ownership of the *Gazette* in 1768 and succeeded Goddard as postmaster. Four years later he erected a house on Gaol Lane (Meeting Street) in which his printing office, post office, and book shop was established at "the sign of Shakespeare's Head." This house is still standing at 21 Meeting Street.

The first move for the erection of a market house was made in 1758 by David Bucklin, who petitioned the General Assembly for permission to have a building erected on town property near the east end of Weybosset Bridge, a project which failed of consummation. Ten years later the *Gazette* published a letter stressing the need of a market house, but again the matter was dropped. Finally in August, 1771, in response to a petition signed by a number of townspeople, the General Assembly granted a lottery for raising a sufficient sum for the joint purpose of paving the street leading to the Court House (North and South Court streets) and erecting a public market on the town's land near the bridge,<sup>8</sup> the location originally proposed by Mr. Bucklin.

The scheme of the lottery was published in the *Gazette* in its issue of April 28, 1772, naming as directors Moses Brown, James Lovell, David Harris, and Elisha Mowry, Jr. The proceeds proved to be sufficient for the undertaking.

The town's land selected as a site for the market house, and previously known as the Market Place, was identified by the Town Council in the year of the lottery as the Parade. A number of streets were renamed at that time,<sup>9</sup> involving certain changes in the vicinity of the bridge. The Towne street became Water Street (now South Main) south of the Parade and King Street (now North Main) northerly to the Court House lot. Market Street extended from the

<sup>8</sup>*R.I.C.R.*, v. 7, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup>Record Book of Deeds, 20 (1), 01.

Parade across the bridge to "the parting of the road by Jacob Whitman" (now Turks Head Building). Weybosset Street led from Whitman's Corner to Muddy Dock (Dorrance Street) and continued to Abbott Square as Broad Street. Two highways laid out in the middle of the century, each originally identified as "the back street," were named, respectively, Westminster Street and Benefit Street. Rosemary Lane was renamed Hanover Street (now College).

Three well-known townsmen dwelt on King Street facing the Parade; namely, Dr. Ephraim Bowen at the corner of Hanover Street; Joseph Jenckes, one-time governor of the colony; and Jabez Bowen, soon to be lieutenant governor, whose house was erected opposite the bridge in 1745 on the site of Daniel Abbott's earlier dwelling. This house in later years was known as the Manufacturers Hotel. North of the bridge, where the School of Design Auditorium now stands, was a row of wooden houses.

As a site for a market house the Parade had little in its favor except its central location. The area south of the bridge was ungraded and unimproved and, in the words of an eye-witness, was "a deep, filthy dock, in which the tidewater flowed up to the west line of the main street."<sup>10</sup> The bridge abutments, elevated some ten feet above low water line, were in alignment with the present easterly line of Canal Street and the roadway from the bridge to King Street ran about midway between the Market House and the School of Design Auditorium as they stand today. The abutments on Weybosset side lined with the present east face of the Hospital Trust Building.

Under an agreement in August, 1772, between Moses Brown, director of the lottery, and John Wiley, the latter filled the land up to the level of the bridge.<sup>11</sup> The town records for that year include a statement by Charles Keen "for my plow plowing down road to the college to get dirt to fill up the lot."<sup>12</sup> A year later John Brown was appointed at town meeting to build a retaining wall beneath the bridge from the abutment to "the first trussel," a distance of thirty feet; to extend the wall eighty-five feet southerly on the bed

<sup>10</sup>John A. Howland in an address at a meeting of Veteran Citizens, printed in *Providence Journal*, March 15, 1883.

<sup>11</sup>Providence Town Papers, R.I.H.S., v. 2, p. 54, no. 466. Hereafter cited as P.T.P.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 2, p. 57, no. 473.

of the river, ten feet in height, to the end of the town land; and to complete the filling of the area.<sup>13</sup>

Plans for the Market House were prepared by Joseph Brown and Stephen Hopkins. Presumably Brown, who already had designed the College Edifice, contributed the architectural features and Hopkins was concerned with details of the general plan. The excavations were commenced May 25, 1773.

From certain bills rendered for work and materials it is possible to follow the construction of the Market House.<sup>14</sup> For June, 1773, there are statements from Joseph Jewett for digging out the cellar; from Jehu Smith for carting timber; and from James Field for four cords of building stone. The *Gazette* reported June 12 that "Tuesday last the first stone of the Market-House was laid by Nicholas Brown Esq." In August bills were rendered by Zepheniah Andrews for mason work; Nathaniel and Elisha Burr for brick; Asa Hopkins for making arches; and Green and Arnold for nails, lime, chalk-board for arches, and "one gallon of rum for the raising." Amos Horton filed a statement October 20 for nailing board on under floors, and another November 5 for work from June 1 on the cellar wall. Bills were paid in December for general supplies including 242 feet of water table of Connecticut stone; oak board and pine plank; and "rum for the raising." In the same month mention was made of the erection of a wharf for landing brick and the arrival at the wharf of 70,000 bricks.

Apparently work was suspended for the winter with the walls raised to the second floor level. The next entries are for June, 1774: Green and Arnold for carting timber and William Semans for repairing scaffolding and arches. Amos Horton presented a bill July 6 for cutting and laying the water table, delivered on the job six months previously; this was "ogee" in profile and set directly above the brick belt course over the arches. Asa Hopkins's statement that month had some quaint entries: "makeing timber and puting it on the walls to prevent its spreading . . . mending the beams and joysts which was broken & Assisting to git the timber Down from the Courthouse yard for roof and upper floor . . . Shifting the 2d floor which was put on wrong by the reason of the marks being

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 2, p. 75, no. 544.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, various entries in v. 2.

worn out Draging on the pavements when brought from the Court-house yard."<sup>15</sup>

Two bills rendered later in the year are of significance in reconstructing the building's original status. One was from Green and Arnold for glazing twenty-two windows with 528 squares of 8 by 10 glass.<sup>16</sup> That would be seven windows on each side and three on each end in the second story and one in each garret gable end, with twenty-four panes in each window. The other was from Hammond and Smith including items for 39½ squares roof boarding, 21,000 shingles, 165 feet of jet, 160 feet bedmold, 94 feet gable cornice, 29 squares garret floor, one large scuttle in the roof, one 13-foot ladder, 158 feet jet plank, and 8 cellar window frames.<sup>17</sup> All of this clearly indicates a gable roof above the second story, pitched like the present roof, with a wood cornice and rake mouldings.

From bills rendered in 1775 for lumber, boarding, nails, lime, laths, and for "completing 20 doorways and doors and fastenings" it would seem that the second story was partitioned for offices during that year.<sup>18</sup> In 1777 ten stalls were erected on the ground floor and were rented to produce merchants, and scales and weights were installed.<sup>19</sup>

The first story design, employing the use of rugged arches in all the outside walls, provided a very flexible plan that was susceptible to many alterations in later years without affecting the general wall structure. There appears to be no record of the original floor plan. Evidently there was a cellar,<sup>20</sup> which may have been at the east end of the building, of a length to include three arches on each side wall, the floor above it located at the present first floor level. At one time there was a doorway in the east arch of the north facade,<sup>21</sup> which may have been original. The other wall arches over the cellar section were probably filled with windows as at present, both above and below the first floor. Stairs were doubtless located near

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 2, p. 123, no. 735.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 2, p. 118, no. 718.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 2, p. 123, no. 736.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 3, p. 23, no. 914; p. 27, no. 923; p. 36, no. 950.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 4, p. 11, no. 1349.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 2, p. 80, no. 565. Itemized bill, May to September, 1772, for stone, rum, plowing, carting, filling, scaffolding, and digging the cellar.

<sup>21</sup>Shown in photograph taken ca. 1867.

the entrance door, leading to the cellar and second story. The wall arches in the west part of the building, beyond the cellar, were open to the ground.<sup>22</sup>

With the completion of the Market House and the improvement of its surroundings the Parade became the civic center. It was there in the night of March 2, 1775, that the men and women of Providence showed their resistance to unjust taxation by burning British tea, as recorded on a tablet erected on the building in 1894 by the Gaspee Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

During the war the French troops paid a number of visits to Providence. A request from the quartermaster general to appropriate the Market House to store the baggage of the army is reported in the town records of April 9, 1781. Permission was granted him "to make use of the Upper Lofts of the Market House Building as long as he shall want the same for the Use of the said Army on Condition of his laying a Tight double Floor in the Middle Loft and Keeping and Leaving the Windows and that part of said Building which shall be improved by the Army in as good Repair as the same is now (saving the natural Decay) and building such a Pair of Stairs as he may think proper in such place as shall be directed."<sup>23</sup> On April 18 the town further agreed to provide quarters for the French officers and to make available the "lower room" of the Market House. The troops arrived in June and established a camp near the present Hayward Park. Rochambeau was guest of Deputy Governor Bowen at his home on the Parade. Colonel de Vioménil and two of his aides stayed with Joseph Brown in his dwelling erected in 1774 (still standing at 50 South Main Street) and the Comte de Fersen lodged with Nicholas Brown in a house which stood on a site opposite the west front of the present Court House. About fifty other officers were quartered in the town in various homes.<sup>24</sup>

At a town meeting March 23, 1782, it was "resolved that when the French troops shall have done making use of the market and shall have delivered the same up again for the use of the town that Mr. James Lawrence be permitted to improve a room in the upper

<sup>22</sup>Shown in engraving ca. 1830.

<sup>23</sup>P.T.P., v. 6, p. 32, no. 2407.

<sup>24</sup>Howard W. Preston, "Rochambeau and the French Troops in Providence," *R. I. Hist. Soc. Coll.*, v. 17, p. 1.

part thereof for an insurance office [the first of record in Providence] on his agreeing with the committee who have the care of the market house, for the use of the same and paying as much rent as any other person will offer to give for the same room."<sup>25</sup> By a town resolution the following July 8 Theodore Foster, a lawyer, was permitted to occupy a room in the market house building "on same conditions as granted to Lawrence."<sup>26</sup>

In 1784 the Parade and the wharf were paved by Zephaniah Andrews,<sup>27</sup> and trees and posts were set out under direction of Nicholas Brown.<sup>28</sup> The "paving" expenses incurred by the town included posts, trees, scow hire, and seven gallons of rum.

At a town meeting July 29, 1785, Captain Benjamin Hoppin was proclaimed clerk of the market and Dr. Ephraim Bowen, James Arnold, Nicholas Brown, and Arthur Fenner, Jr., were named a committee "to take the whole charge and command of the market house and to put it under proper regulations, as they shall think best, to fit out the stalls, and the market house cellar, at vendue, and that they be empowered to appoint a suitable person to collect such customary wharffage and storage in the cellar as shall become due for articles landed on the market house wharf, or stored in the market house cellar."<sup>29</sup> This entry on the town records was signed by Theodore Foster, town clerk.

Pursuant to an act by the General Assembly in 1790 providing for a lottery to raise £3000,<sup>30</sup> Weybosset Bridge was again rebuilt in 1792, 120 feet long between abutment walls and 56 feet wide, with a draw of the lift type. The east abutment was moved out into the river to the line of the wall built by John Brown in 1773 and was continued northerly to the present Steeple Street. The shore was filled to the height of the wall, and a new highway (now Canal Street) was constructed.

In 1793 the town clerk's office was established in the Market House. Two years later the town purchased the Congregational Church at Benefit and College streets (vacated on completion of

<sup>25</sup>P.T.P., v. 6, p. 148, no. 2740.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 9, p. 75, no. 3756.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 9, p. 9, no. 3589.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 8, p. 130, no. 3498.

<sup>30</sup>R.I.C.R., v. 10, p. 395.

a new meeting house at the corner of Benefit and Benevolent streets), named it the Town House, and fitted it for town uses, retaining the clerk's office in the Market House.

In 1797 St. John's Lodge of Masons received permission to build a third story on the Market House for its use and at its expense. The old roof was removed, the outside walls raised, and a new gable roof and cornice added, giving the structure its present form. A tablet bearing a masonic emblem was placed in the west gable, where the clock is now located, and a roof balustrade was built above the cornice. On December 27, 1797, the new masonic hall, the first in Rhode Island, was dedicated by Grand Master Jabez Bowen, as memorialized by a bronze tablet erected on the building in 1916.

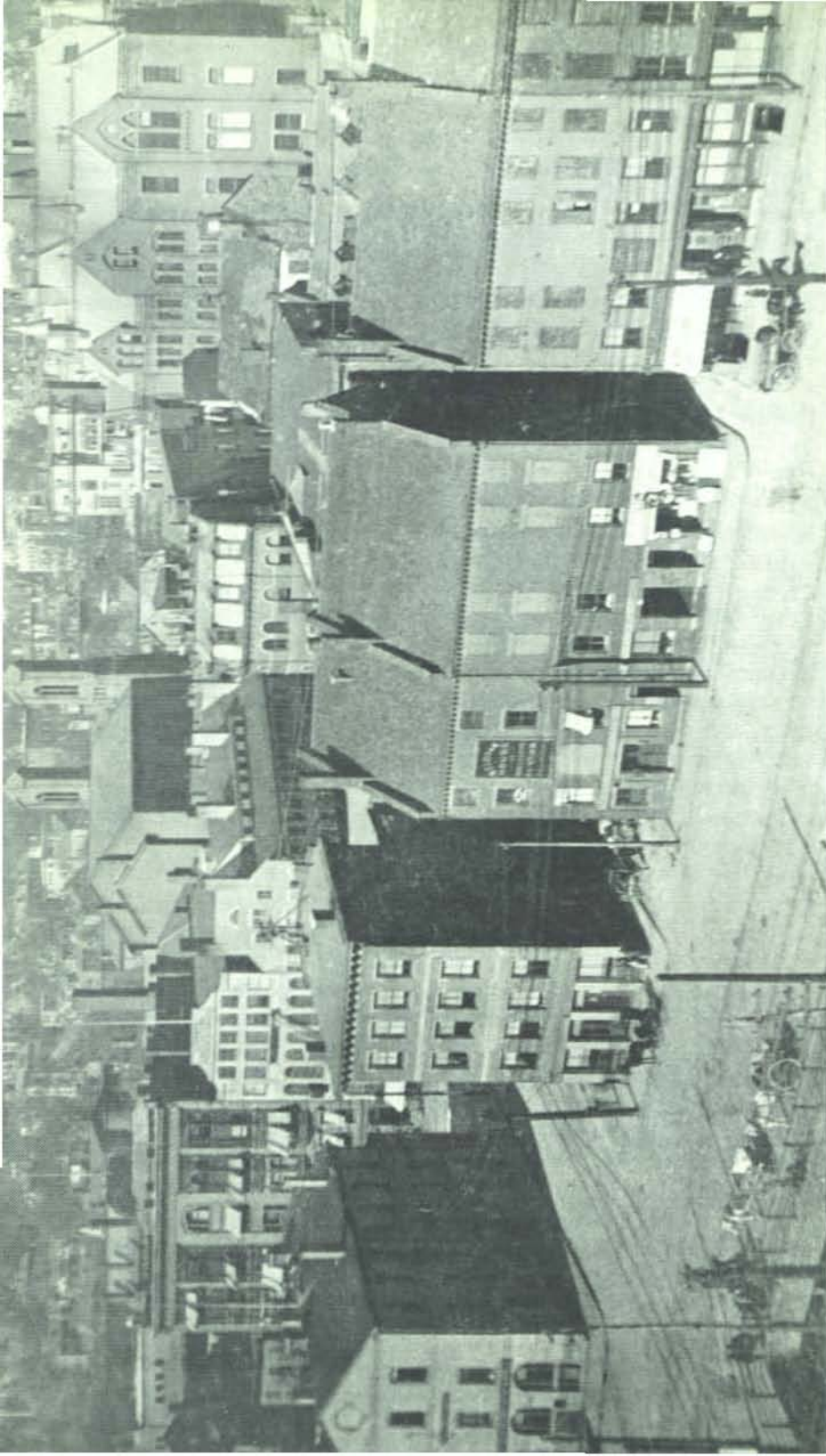
By the close of the century the Parade had become almost entirely a business area, and the first stories of most of the houses surrounding it had been converted into shops. The Exchange Coffee House, a three-story gambrel-roof building, was built near the bridge at the corner of the new waterfront street and one floor became the post office and office of the *Gazette* in 1793. John Carter, its publisher, also maintained a stationery and book shop and for several years was associated with William Wilkinson, who succeeded him as postmaster.

In a second official listing of street names in 1805,<sup>31</sup> the former Towne Street was renamed Main Street; Hanover Street was changed to College Street; and the new street north of the Parade, on which the Coffee House stood, was named Water Street (now Canal).

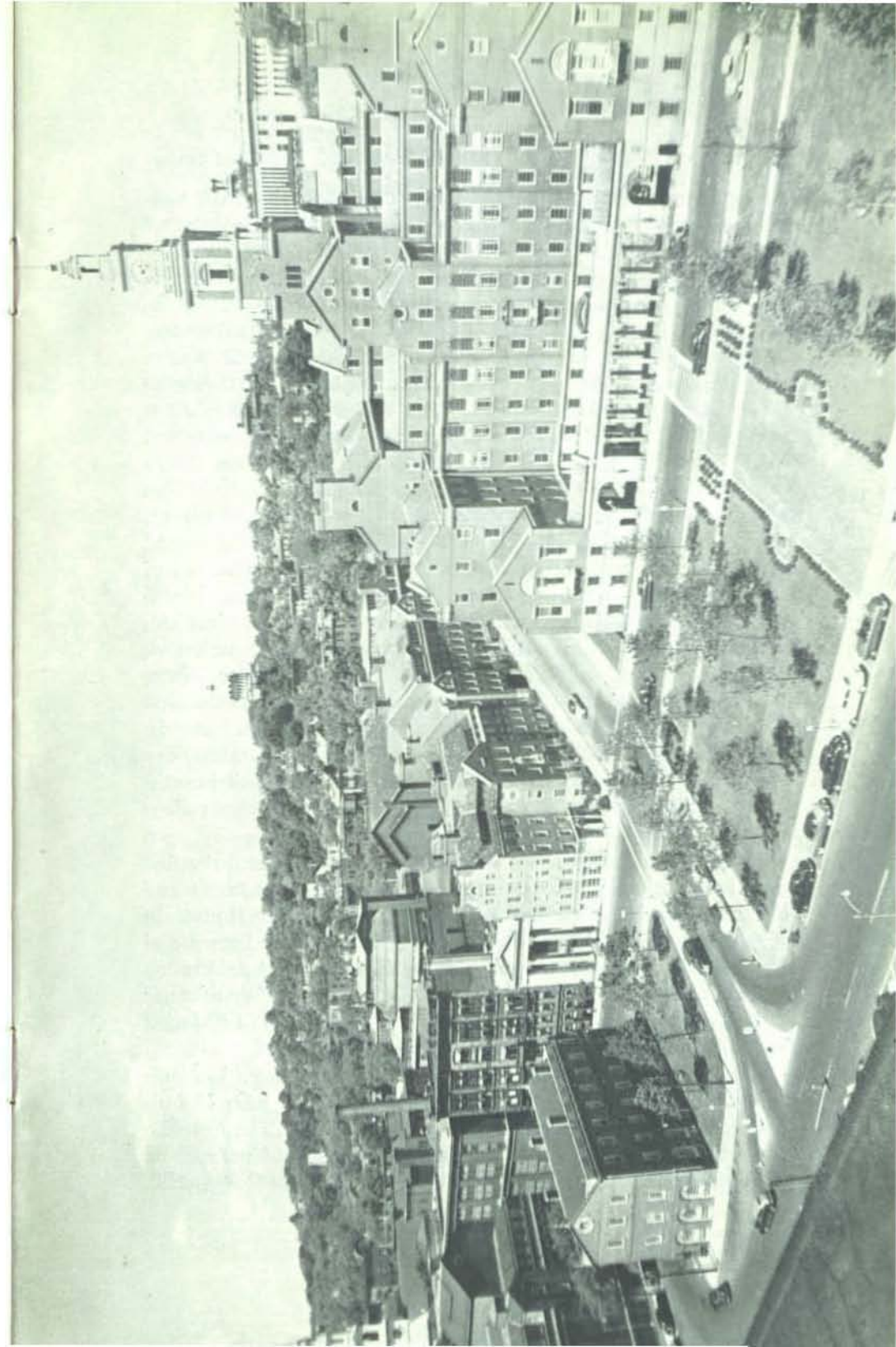
In the early years of the nineteenth century a business trend was under way on Weybosset side. The Exchange Bank was established at the northwest corner of Westminster and Exchange streets in 1801; the Washington Insurance Company erected a building near the end of the Great Bridge (now Washington Row) in 1802; and the post office was moved in that year by Dr. Benjamin West, successor to Wilkinson as postmaster, to Whitman Block (Turks Head Building). In 1813 the Union Bank Building was erected, part of which is still standing at 10 Westminster Street.

On September 23, 1815, occurred the Great Storm with a gale of extreme violence, accompanied by a tide that rose to a height of 11 feet 9½ inches above mean high water. A tablet set on the

<sup>31</sup>Providence Town Council Proceedings, v. 8, p. 535.



MARKET SQUARE AREA, 1898  
(from the Grosvenor Building)



MARKET SQUARE AREA, 1952  
(from the Grosvenor Building)

Market House shows the line three and a half feet above the sidewalk. Extensive damage was caused, including the demolition of Weybosset Bridge. After the wreckage had been cleared away the town inaugurated a program of waterfront improvements. The new bridge, ninety-five feet in width, supported on piles driven in the river bed and completed in July, 1816, was a fixed span, closing Providence River to navigation at that point. Harbor lines were established, one hundred fifteen feet apart at the bridge and diverging as they extended down the river. South Water Street was laid out southerly from the Parade to Fox Point in 1817, thirty feet wide and twenty-five feet from the east harbor line. West Water (now Dyer) Street was constructed along the west harbor line from the bridge to Long Wharf (built about 1798, now Custom House Street). Water (Canal) Street was extended to Smith Street in 1825, and Cove Street was constructed on what is now the south roadway of Exchange Place. Two bridges were built by the Providence Washington Insurance Company with the authority of the town in 1828, one located north of and parallel to Weybosset Bridge, later known as Washington Bridge, extending Cove Street easterly to Water (Canal) Street and the other at right angles, erected over the west bank of the river, coinciding with the present Washington Row. In that year the Blackstone Canal to Worcester was opened, its terminus located in a boat basin north of a causeway which extended northwesterly across the narrow end of the cove from the present Haymarket Street.

In 1820 the first sidewalks were built in the town and the first street lamps installed. In the same year the *Manufacturers and Farmers Journal* was founded with offices in the Coffee House. In 1824 the first *Providence Directory* was published by Brown and Danforth, the last printers of the *Gazette* (which ceased publication in 1825) at their printing office in Abbott Still House. Of significance in the "list of names of streets, etc." in the directory is "Market Square," superseding the Parade in name.

Three noteworthy buildings: Franklin House, Roger Williams Bank Building, and Granite Block, all designed by John Holden Greene, were erected on Market Square in 1823-24. The Franklin House had a five-story facade with a distinctive roof parapet on Main Street; and a court yard at the rear, entered from College Hill,

gave entry to the main floor on the second level, where the tap room was located. The hotel became the stopping place for the Boston and New York stage coaches. The front of the Roger Williams Bank Building, adjoining it to the north, was composed of five stories of large windows in a granite framework, crowned by a sculptured parapet. Of similar wall construction was the Granite Block, a four-story business building located between Main Street and the Coffee House on the north side of the square. The west side of Main Street, from Market Square to Steeple Street, was popularly known as Cheapside and was the fashionable shopping center of the period. On South Water Street a row of brick warehouses extended southerly from Market Square.

After Providence had received a city charter in 1832, the City Council met in the Market House. A two-story addition, seven feet wide, was built at the east end of the building in 1833 with a central projection 14 feet wide and four feet deep. It was designed by James C. Bucklin and provided a new entrance and stairway. Balustrades of the Greek type were installed above the wing and over the main cornice of the building. A few years later a basement was built in the western part of the building, hitherto open to the ground; the first story line was raised and windows were installed in the arched openings. The basement was used as a market, access to which was provided by bulkhead entrances and steep stone steps.

Weybosset Bridge was again rebuilt in 1843 to a width of 135 feet, its southerly line nearly parallel with and some fifteen feet south of the south line of the Market House. In the same year the Washington Buildings, designed by Bucklin, were built on the west side of Washington Row, replacing the former Washington Building of 1802. The Cove basin was constructed in 1847, together with retaining walls extending from its easterly rim to provide a channel into the Providence River, and the remainder of the original cove, east and south of the basin, was filled. The railroad depot, designed by Thomas A. Tefft, was erected on the south border of the basin, and the area south of it was named Exchange Place. Exchange Bridge was constructed across the new channel, from Exchange Place to Canal Street (the northerly part of the present Memorial Square) in 1848. In the same year Dyer Street, laid out from Eddy Street to Long Wharf in 1825, was extended northerly across the slips



flanking that wharf (Custom House Street) to the great bridge to include the former West Water Street, which was widened by the removal of the east end of the Union Bank Building. Both Dyer and South Water streets were lined with wharves for sailing vessels.

In 1850 the What Cheer Block (still standing at 20 Market Square), designed by C. G. and J. R. Hall, was built on the site of the Manufacturers Hotel adjacent to the Roger Williams Bank Building. Soon afterwards two business buildings replaced the Coffee House. These were all brownstone structures. Originally the center entrance of What Cheer Block was an open archway, extending through the building; this provided access to a building erected in the rear in 1856, designed by Tefft for the Providence Gas Company, a corporation which had commenced manufacturing gas and laying mains for street lights eight years previously. The post office was located in What Cheer Block until the Federal Building was opened on Custom House Street in 1857.

Extensive alterations were made to the interior of the Market House in 1865-66, providing quarters for practically all city departments,<sup>32</sup> and for twelve years thereafter it was known as the City Building. Offices were provided in the first story and basement for the city treasurer, city auditor, collector of taxes, superintendent of health, the chiefs of the police and fire departments, and other officers and bureaus. In the second story were the mayor's office (southeast corner), the municipal court (northeast corner), city clerk (west end), and the assessor of taxes (south side). The third story (vacated by the Masons in 1853) contained the council chamber on the west and the aldermen's chamber on the east. Plumbing and heating systems, record vaults, and speaking tubes were installed.

After the opening of the City Building, use of the Town House on Benefit Street was continued for a short time as a ward room and fire engine station, and it was then torn down. On its site the Providence County Court House, designed by Stone and Carpenter, was erected and dedicated in 1877.

Horse car lines were put in operation on the city streets in 1864 and a passenger depot was erected by the Union Railroad Company in 1867, supported on piles driven in the river north of and adjacent to Weybosset Bridge. The widening of College Street and its

extension to South Water Street in 1867 forced the razing of the Abbott Still House. The river retaining walls were extended southerly to Crawford Street in 1875 and Crawford Bridge was erected as a fixed span, establishing a new head of navigation. The bridge was 130 feet wide, its ends projecting at right angles northerly to Weybosset Bridge with pile supports driven in the river bed leaving a river opening 75 feet wide. The extensions provided added widths for South Water and Dyer streets.

The area surrounding the river opening soon became an open market where sections of the highways were rented to venders. In ensuing years fruit and produce merchants established quarters in the ground floors of South Water and Dyer Street warehouses, and tracks were laid on those highways on which freight cars, drawn by strings of horses, brought supplies to the dealers.

The Market House was abandoned for city use when the City Hall was opened in 1878; and the building was leased to the Providence Board of Trade, which occupied the first story and rented rooms in the rest of the building. One of the early tenants was the Rhode Island Electric Lighting Company, a concern authorized by the City Council in 1882 "to erect poles and wires for conducting electricity for light, heat and motive power to consumers." The first arc lights in the city were installed by the company on Market Square and Westminster Street in that year.

Numerous changes were made in the Market House in ensuing years. Entrances were placed in the central arches of the side walls, that on the north leading to the Board of Trade's quarters and that on the south opening into a stairway hall. The second and third story windows were deepened and large-paned window sash installed. The first story was stripped of its partitions and converted into a single room with iron posts installed to support the second floor beams. The roof balustrade was removed, and the exterior brick walls were given a coat of yellow paint.

A cable tramway line was constructed from the foot of College Hill to Red Bridge and was operated from 1890 to 1895. During those years trolleys succeeded horse cars on other lines. In 1895 trolley cars were put in operation on the Red Bridge route, aided by a counterweight system on College Hill, which was maintained until the street railway tunnel was opened in 1914. Civic progress during

<sup>32</sup>*Providence City Manual . . . 1865-66.* (Providence, 1865), p. 109.

the nineties included the filling of the Cove basin, the erection of a new railroad station on Exchange Place, the construction of new retaining walls for the Providence River, and the erection of steel bridges in replacement of the former Weybosset, Washington (re-named Burnside), Washington Row, and Exchange bridges. The horse car depot on Market Square was removed; and the clock, which had been a feature of its main entrance, was installed in the west pediment of the Market House.

The erection of the Post Office Bridge, between Burnside and Exchange bridges in 1904, provided the final link in a continuous span (except for river openings) 1147 feet wide extending from the head of navigation at Crawford Street to the railroad viaduct (erected 1908). In 1913 the Roger Williams Bank Building was torn down and was replaced by the marble-fronted Peoples Savings Bank, designed by Clarke and Howe.

The Board of Trade was reorganized as the Chamber of Commerce in 1913. Two years later the city renewed the Chamber's lease of the Market House for a ten-year term and, in consideration of an increased rental, undertook a partial restoration of the building's exterior under supervision of Norman M. Isham and John Hutchins Cady. The work included a roof balustrade and other Colonial embellishments and the removal of paint from the brickwork. Minor interior alterations were made from time to time, and a new electric clock was installed. The bulkhead entrances, with stone steps leading from the sidewalk to the basement, had gradually been eliminated and the last to survive was in the center of the west wall, providing access to quarters of the business branch of the Providence Public Library.

Prominent among the many Market House tenants during its occupancy by the Board of Trade and the Chamber of Commerce were the Manville Company, Henry Lippitt and Company, Silver Spring Bleaching and Dyeing Company, Merino Manufacturing Company, Social Manufacturing Company, Killingly Manufacturing Company, John H. Ormsbee (coal), G. A. Stockwell (British Vice Consul), John F. Lennon (flour), William A. Dean (art photographer), Nichols and Williams (barbers), and the Rhode Island Poultry Association.

During World War I the Washington Buildings on Washington

Row were razed and the Hospital Trust Building was erected on the site.

The market era of the Market Square vicinity closed in 1927 when a new produce center was opened on Harris Avenue and the city terminated the market gardeners' leases of highway spaces adjoining the river. Forthwith the environment of the Market House became the scene of demolition and reconstruction activities that continued almost without pause for nine years. Crawford Bridge, together with its extensions along South Water and Dyer streets, was reconstructed in stone, steel, and reinforced concrete. Two entire blocks, bounded by South Water, College, Benefit, Hopkins, South Main, and Crawford streets were stripped bare of buildings, including many old landmarks. South Main Street was widened between Market Square and Crawford Street. The lines of College Street were revised southerly, leaving an area about 50 feet wide adjacent to the Market House that was later made into a lawn. The new Providence County Court House (1928-33) was erected on the south side of College Street; and the Metcalf Building of the Rhode Island School of Design was built in 1936 on the north side of the street. Both buildings were designed by Jackson, Robertson, and Adams. A portion of the facade of Franklin House was preserved and incorporated as a part of the latter building.

When Providence observed its tercentenary in 1936 the Market House was the sole survivor of Colonial Providence in the Market Square area. During generations of civic development it had stood complacently, structurally unchanged since its third story had been added in 1797. Bad days lay ahead, however, in which its Colonial character, if not its very existence, was in jeopardy.

It may have been a sag in the roof ridge that first caught the watchful eye of the Commissioner of Public Buildings. After an examination of the roof structure and the third story walls he announced, early in 1938, that the building was unsafe for occupancy. The Chamber of Commerce was ordered to vacate and did so July 1. Plans for reconstruction were made by the city architect and in August the work of demolition was commenced. On September 21 Providence was visited by a hurricane, greater in intensity than the one of 1815 and accompanied by a tide that rose to a level nearly two feet higher than in that year, as marked by a tablet on

the Market House. Although the "condemned" roof trusses were bared and exposed to the elements when the hurricane struck, it is interesting to record that they were undamaged by the gale.

By the time the entire roof and the third story walls had been taken down the people of Providence became uneasy as to the fate of the historic structure. The city architect announced that the oak roof beams would be replaced by steel trusses; otherwise little information was available. City officials were apathetic, some favoring the building's demolition. Near the close of 1938 the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Institute of Architects made a plea for an authentic restoration. Mayor John F. Collins, soon after his inauguration in January, 1939, ordered the preparation of revised plans by B. G. V. Zetterstrom, new city architect, with members of the Chapter of Architects as consultants. Work was resumed in May of that year as a Works Progress Administration project and the exterior was substantially completed a year later. The upper part of the walls was rebuilt with bricks conforming to the original size and a steel and concrete roof was erected and covered with slate. The second and third story windows were restored to their original state, with sills raised and small panes of glass installed. The windows of the arched openings were redesigned with sashes similar to those of the First Baptist Meeting House. A Colonial type of roof balustrade was built above the main cornice. Meanwhile interior alterations were under way, including new partitions, fireproof stairways, and heating, plumbing, electric, and sprinkler systems, a project in which the architectural consultants had no hand. Before the end of 1940 the partially completed alterations were suspended, and for the next decade the building was vacant.

The Rhode Island School of Design Auditorium, designed by Philip D. Creer, was erected on the block north of the Market House in 1940, replacing the Granite Block and adjacent structures.

During the course of World War II several abortive attempts were made to complete the rehabilitation of the Market House. A proposal was made in 1945 for leasing the building to the state for a Juvenile Court. Plans were prepared for that purpose, but the construction estimates were high, and the plan was abandoned.

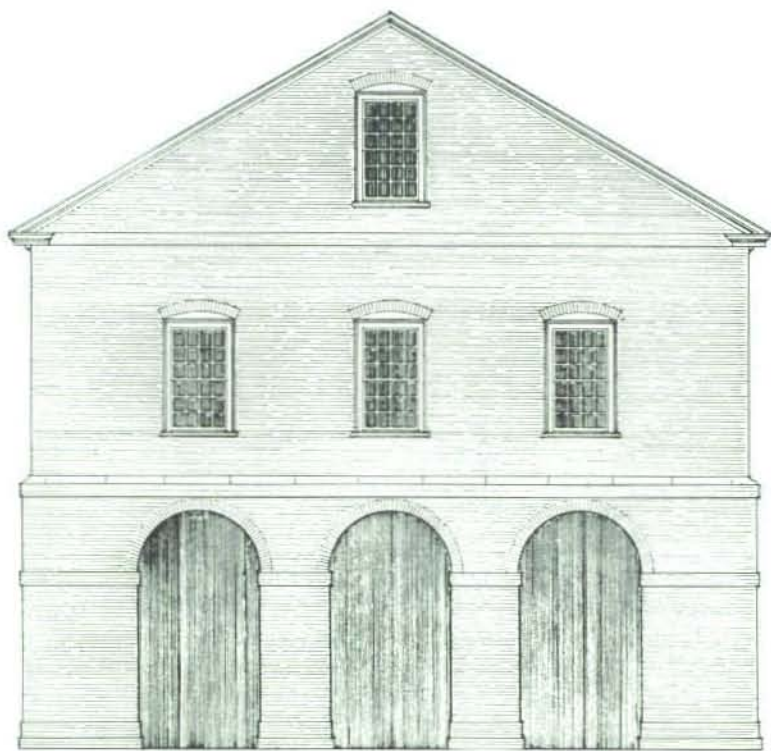
Under a deed signed by Mayor Dennis J. Roberts May 27, 1948, the city gave the Market House to the Rhode Island School of Design

for educational and corporate purposes with the provision that the exterior of the building should be maintained and preserved in conformity with its historical architectural character. The school estate, since the erection of its first building on Waterman Street in 1892, had expanded to include all of the block bounded by Waterman, North Main, College, and Benefit streets except the What Cheer Block (now known as the Textron Building). The latest acquisition had been the Peoples Savings Bank, purchased after the bank had moved to a new building at 145 Westminster Street. The school auditorium, as already recorded, occupied the block north of the Market House.

In April, 1949, the School of Design announced the engagement of John Hutchins Cady as architect and the Office of Hollis French as engineer to develop plans for adapting the Market House for school purposes. In the fall of that year, while plans were under way, the building was partially renovated and served as headquarters for the annual Red Feather campaign. The general contract for altering and rehabilitating the Market House was awarded to A. C. Beals Company, and work was commenced March 1, 1950.

The plans were drawn to provide quarters for the departments of architecture, landscape architecture, and design. Executive offices and a public exhibition room were laid out on the first floor; class rooms and draughting rooms in the upper stories and basement. The fireproof stairways and the toilet rooms, built in 1940, were retained with modifications; in other respects the interior was almost entirely altered. The boiler room was discontinued and the heating, electric, and telephone lines were connected by underground pipes with the school's central systems. Colonial precedent was followed in architectural details so far as utility and restrictions imposed by the building laws would permit. The main entrance was established on the North Main Street end, in which a new doorway was installed, its design influenced by that of the John Brown House on Power Street. Oak trees were planted on the lawn south of the building.

The rehabilitated Market House, with a background of civic, commercial, and business usefulness, was opened for educational purposes in the autumn of 1950 and was re-dedicated by President



THE ORIGINAL MARKET HOUSE

Drawing by the author, 1952, based on documentary records  
and current measurements

Max W. Sullivan of the School of Design at a ceremony December 21 of that year.

The Market Square vicinity was further embellished, between 1950 and 1952, by landscape improvements on public land west of the Court House between South Main and South Water streets. The project, financed by private subscriptions, included a wide brick pathway centering on the building, flanked on the north and south by two tree-lined memorial parks dedicated, respectively, to Henry B. Gardner, Jr., a Providence lawyer who lost his life in World War II, and F. Ellis Jackson, architect of the Court House, who died in 1950.

## ANARCH IN RHODE ISLAND

by ABE C. RAVITZ\*

[The portion of *The Anarchiad* pertaining to Rhode Island follows  
Mr. Ravitz's article.]

THE INHABITANTS and political leaders of Rhode Island during the critical years 1786 and 1787 fell under the keen ire of the Connecticut Wits: Lemuel Hopkins, David Humphreys, Joel Barlow, and John Trumbull. These poets of a Federalist mind collaborated on a now forgotten work called *The Anarchiad*, a poem which has received little illuminating commentary throughout the years.<sup>1</sup> The mob of Shays had torn Massachusetts asunder; and Anarch, the poetic epitome of black chaos, had (according to the Wits) a "thriving" state of affairs in Rhode Island. So, in a series of lively papers numbered and titled *American Antiquities*, the quartet verbally assaulted the rising "mobocracy" in their neighboring state. A study of the poem and its many allusions in terms of the portrayed Rhode Island scene is valuable not only for an understanding of the poem but also for a clarification of Federalist attitude toward Rhode Island and for a composite view of the turbulent situation as seen through the eyes of contemporary New Englanders.

On May 3, 1786, Rhode Island climbed upon the paper money band wagon by electing John Collins as Governor and Daniel Owen as Deputy-Governor over the Revolutionary War Governor, William Greene, and his running mate. Shortly after the election, a paper money bank was set up; certificates were issued; and tender laws that attempted to stabilize the new currency were enacted. The legislative delegation from the town of Providence opposed these steps, and their fears were soon justified as depreciation of the paper promptly began.<sup>2</sup> The General Assembly then made mandatory the acceptance of the paper bills, subjecting those refusing to accept the

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<sup>1</sup>Luther G. Riggs, ed., *The Anarchiad*, 1861. The poem originally appeared in the *New Haven Gazette and Connecticut Magazine*, October 1786 to September 1787. Vernon Parrington in *The Connecticut Wits*, 1926, and Leon Howard in *The Connecticut Wits*, 1943, have tried to shed some light on the work and its background; but still the poem remains largely obscure. This study is based primarily on new materials.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel Greene Arnold, *History of the State of Rhode Island*, New York, 1874, vol. 2, pp. 520-525.

new currency to fines and loss of the rights of a "freeman." The feared populism had seized control in Rhode Island. And as the farmers and other numerous debtors were solidly behind the activities of the government, those creditors who stood to lose by this transference to a paper standard bitterly attacked the system. Noah Webster, writing in the Providence *United States Chronicle* under the pseudonym of "Tom Thoughtful," cried out that "the Devil" was in his countrymen, and specified that "a tender law is the Devil." He continued, "When I trust a man a sum of money, I expect he will return the full value . . . But when mobs and conventions oppose the course of justice, and legislatures make paper and old horses a legal tender in all cases, the world will exclaim with one voice, *you are rogues* . . ."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Webster and his Federalist cohorts were extremely shocked by the state of affairs in Rhode Island. The mob was "cloth'd" with legal power; the dire need for a strong central governing force was growing with each passing day. And when the Hartford Wits surveyed this scene, Old Anarch was observed operating in all his chaotic glory.

Humphreys and Hopkins had written a "dove-tailing" statement near the conclusion of *American Antiquities No. 1* to the effect that the "blessings of paper money and confusion, as now experienced in Rhode Island, are predicted [in future papers of the poem] in the most beautiful and awful manner . . ."<sup>4</sup> The second number of *American Antiquities* continued to whet the literary appetites of Federalists for a depiction of the Rhode Island scene; however, the Wits complained of a present inability "to decypher all the lines of the vision which evidently alluded to the beatific scenes of paper money and confusion now so gloriously displayed in Rhode Island."<sup>5</sup> It was in their third effort, however, that the poets gave their full attention to this subject, and the result was a racy *tour de force* permeating every economic aspect of the bitterly controversial situation.

Having disposed of Governors Collins and Owen at the very beginning of the poetical section, the poets began to rebuke Henry Good-

<sup>3</sup>Providence *United States Chronicle*, September 28, 1786. The New York Public Library has Webster's personal copy of the newspaper with a marginal note written by Webster identifying himself as the author. The article also appears in Webster's *Essays and Fugitive Writings*, 1790.

<sup>4</sup>*New Haven Gazette*, October 26, 1786.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, November 2, 1786.

win, a lawyer, and thus introduced the important Trevett-Weeden case into *The Anarchiad*. This case came up in time to test the "validity and constitutionality" of the legislature's act in forcing merchants to accept paper money on the same standard as gold in exchange for goods. John Weeden was a Newport butcher who had refused to accept the paper bills of John Trevett. The matter was brought before the Superior Court with Goodwin acting as attorney for the complainant. The court, however, dismissed the complaint against Weeden by declaring that the forcing act was unconstitutional. Whereupon the Rhode Island Assembly hurriedly met and summoned the presiding judges of the Trevett-Weeden affair "to assign the reasons and grounds" for their decision. After a hearing the Assembly decided that "no satisfactory reasons" had been rendered by those judges for their action—and they were lucky to escape impeachment.<sup>6</sup> The Connecticut Wits termed this proceeding "the General Court's unpardon'd sin." And while General James M. Varnum, one of Weeden's attorneys, was commended for his honesty, his opponent in the case, Goodwin, was pointed out in this way:

There G\_\_\_\_\_n stands, his head with quibbles fill'd;  
His tongue in lies, his hand in forg'ry skill'd . . .<sup>7</sup>

The "quibbles" of course were the lawyer's arguments advanced during the trial in favor of the General Assembly's compulsory action in backing up the weak currency; while his "lies" and "forg'ry" earned Goodwin Old Anarch's praise as "my darling knave." Indeed, *American Antiquities No. 3* urged the wiser race to avoid the "snares of law" in Rhode Island, since knavery had won the day in the highest legislative body. Finally, regarding this court case, the Wits praised the "character of the Judges" who had rendered the original just decision; they commended the "Governors" Greene and Bowen, who had been defeated by Collins and Owen, and lauded the "officers of the late army"—who comprised the Society of the Cincinnati of which most of the Wits were members.<sup>8</sup> These individuals men-

<sup>6</sup>Arnold, *op. cit.*, p. 528.

<sup>7</sup>*New Haven Gazette*, December 28, 1786.

<sup>8</sup>Bryce Metcalf, *Original Members and Officers Eligible to the Society of the Cincinnati*, Virginia, 1938. Barlow is listed on page 44, Humphreys, p. 172; Varnum, p. 14 was president of the Rhode Island branch. Members of the Trumbull and Hopkins families are listed on pp. 167 and 315.

tioned, Federalists all, strongly opposed the “inglorious sway” of their state government and enjoyed the full sympathy of their Connecticut friends.

*The Anarchiad* then introduced two more very important elements of the Rhode Island economic picture—the “test act” and the “Know Ye” advertisements. The former was a legal measure purporting to “stimulate and give efficacy to the paper bills.”<sup>9</sup> It required each citizen to take an oath stating that he would consider paper money equal to gold or silver and conduct his business in such a conforming manner. Actually the act imposed penalties as strict for those not complying as the original forcing act had imposed. This new act was labeled “test,” however, as the government badly wanted a vote of confidence in its policies after the shocking Trevett-Weeden case. But the vote was not forthcoming; the “test” was vehemently defeated, especially in Newport and Providence. Yet the law concerning paper money remained intact, and this dilemma of the Rhode Island creditor was set forth by the Wits:

Arm'd with new tests, the licens'd villain bold,  
Presents his bills, and robs them of their gold;  
Their ears, though rogues and counterfeiters lose,  
No legal robber fears the gallows noose.<sup>10</sup>

Very closely allied with the “test act” were the “Know Ye” advertisements, another source of irritation to the creditor. Should a creditor refuse to accept paper bills, a debtor might legally cancel his obligation by depositing the amount of his debt in paper money with a Justice of the Peace. The Justice would then notify the creditor of the action and print an advertisement of this fact in the newspaper. Soon the Rhode Island newspapers were full of these debt canceling advertisements, which invariably began with the words “Know Ye.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>William R. Staples, *Annals of the Town of Providence from Its First Settlement to . . . June 1832*, Providence, 1843, p. 306.

<sup>10</sup>*New Haven Gazette*, December 28, 1786.

<sup>11</sup>A typical example of a “Know Ye” is this one which appeared in the *Providence Gazette* for December 16, 1786: “KNOW YE, That Benjamin Brayton, of Coventry, Yeoman, on the 13th Day of Sept. 1786, at my Dwelling-House in Coventry, lodged with me the Sum of £143, Lawful Money; being in full of the Principal and Interest of a Sum of Money due from the said Benjamin Brayton to Samuel Dorrance, of said Coventry, Yeoman, on a Mortgage: That the said Benjamin Brayton hath in all Respects complied with the Law respecting the Paper Currency; and that the said Samuel Dorrance hath been legally and duly notified thereof.” For an interesting parody of the “Know Ye” advertisements see the *Boston Centinel*, July 25, 1787.

*American Antiquities No. 3* took this theme up in the prose portion by enlisting in the army of the “*State of Confusion*” those debtors who took advantage of the “Know Ye” device to liquidate their liabilities. And the verse excerpt from *The Anarchiad* attacked this roguish method of discharging debts in unmerciful fashion:

The crafty knave his creditor besets,  
And advertising paper pays his debts . . .  
New paper struck, new tests, new tenders made,  
Insult mankind, and help the thriving trade.  
Each weekly print new lists of cheats proclaims,  
Proud to enroll their knav'ries and their names . . .<sup>12</sup>

The “advertising paper” bears dual allusion both to the “Know Ye’s” and to the very institution of paper money; the “press” was truly the very “mint” of the state.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, when the collaborators wrote:

And dark injustice, wrapp'd in paper sheets,  
Rolls a dread torrent through the wasted streets . . .<sup>14</sup>

they alluded to the combined evils of paper money, the “Know Ye’s,” and the infamous “test act.” Old Anarch was indeed at work in Rhode Island; and the Wits, taking their cue from Noah Webster, termed this locale the “realm of rogues.”

In order to point up better the fraudulent activities—the “knav'ries of yon little isle,” the poets brought sentimental favorites into the poem—the “poor” and the “orphan” when they wrote:

There prowls the rascal . . .  
To snare the orphan, and the poor devour . . .

Certainly most of the creditors were neither poor men nor young orphans; however, the theme did receive some press play from the *Providence Gazette and Country Journal* which appealed to the humanity of the debtor by asking him to recall the past when “the widow and the orphan were secured against the rapacious hand of fraud and violence.” And now the article went on to state “how the unavailing . . . tears of the widow and orphan [have] been poured

<sup>12</sup>*New Haven Gazette*, December 28, 1786.

<sup>13</sup>*Loc. cit.*

<sup>14</sup>*Loc. cit.*

out before the merciless wretch," who has fleeced them "according to law."<sup>15</sup> This piece was written by a "Traveller" who had supposedly seen these infamies. And a short time later "An Aged and Distressed Widow" felt compelled to wield her pen in defense of the poor. After leading a wretched existence she had been *legally* robbed of an inheritance when the purveyor of the money brought paper bills and threatened her with a "Know Ye" if she should refuse to accept that tender. Paper money being eight to one at that particular moment, the poor woman received ten dollars instead of eighty.<sup>16</sup> As it is extremely difficult to see either the Hartford Wits or the Federalist publication, the *Providence Gazette*, motivated by the desire for so-called economic justice for widows and orphans, one can safely assume that this theme as expressed both in *American Antiquities No. 3* and in the newspaper was another method—and a strictly journalese one—for raising more heated opposition against the paper money faction.

But the vicious attack levelled at Rhode Island in *The Anarchiad* was felt by another Federalist newspaper, the *Providence United States Chronicle*, in a manner quite different from the *Gazette*. Bennett Wheeler, publisher of the *Chronicle*, printed a series of letters by a certain "Plato." The first of these warned "Plato's" fellow citizens that they knew "not one thousandth part of what is said of us in other states." He then urged them to "read that scandalous and abusive performance, partly in prose and partly in poetry, called 'American Antiquities #3' . . . lately published in Connecticut, Philadelphia, &c. and you will have a specimen of the obloquy thrown upon us owing principally to our 'Know Ye' advertisements . . . As we are a small state it behooves us to be *circumspect*."<sup>17</sup> In writing this "Plato" was wisely considering the coming Constitutional Convention, then only one month off. It would be well for Rhode Island to engender as benevolent a relationship as possible with her sister states, for size promised to be a factor of utmost importance at the convention—which idea was soon borne out by the "Virginia Plan."

Thus the third paper of this collaborative poem by the Connecticut Wits portrayed the absolute domination of Old Anarch in Rhode

<sup>15</sup>*Providence Gazette*, March 3, 1787. *Staples Annals*, pp. 546-547, asserts that this newspaper "opposed the paper money party in the state."

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, August 18, 1787.

<sup>17</sup>*Providence United States Chronicle*, April 12, 1787.

Island. The treatment of the economic disorders encountered there enabled the poets to contribute to American literature one of the most impressive pieces attesting to the utter ineffectuality of the Articles of Confederation.

### THE ANARCHIAD

#### AMERICAN ANTIQUITIES—No. III

*Extracts from The Anarchiad, on paper money*

HAIL! fav'rite State, whose nursing fathers prove  
Their fairest claim to my paternal love!  
Call'd from the deck with pop'lar votes elate,  
The mighty *Jacktar* guides the helm of state;  
Nurs'd on the waves, in blust'ring tempests bred,  
His heart of marble, and his brain of lead,  
My foes subdued while knavery wins the day,  
He rules the senate with inglorious sway;  
Proud, *for one year*, my orders to perform,  
Sails in the whirlwind, and enjoys the storm.

Yet not alone the per'ulous watch he keeps,  
His mate, great O——n, bustles while he sleeps;  
There G——n\* stands, his head with quibbles fill'd;  
His tongue in lies, his hand in forg'ry skill'd;  
To him, my darling knave, my lore I teach,  
Which he to C——s† lends in many a pompous speech.

Oh, roguery! there being's end and aim,  
Fraud, tendry, paper bills, whate'er thy name;  
That medium still, which prompts th' eternal sigh,  
By which great villains flourish, small ones die.  
Plant of infernal seed, without hell's heat,  
Say in what mortal soil thou deign'st to cheat?  
Fair from the Gen'ral Court's unpardon'd sin,  
Ap'st thou the gold Peruvian mines within?

\*HENRY GOODWIN, an attorney residing in Newport, who was reported to have written the Annual Address of the Governor of Rhode Island to the Legislature of that State, at its session in 1786.

†HON. JOHN COLLINS, Governor of Rhode Island from 1786 to 1789.

Wak'd to new life, by my creative power,  
 The press thy mint, and dunghill rags thy ore.  
 Where grow'st thou not? If vain the villain's toil,  
 We ought to blame the culture, not the soil;  
 Fix'd to that isle, it nowhere passes free,  
 But fled from Congres, C——s dwells with thee.

Hail! realm of rogues, renown'd for fraud and guile,  
 All hail; ye knav'ries of yon little isle.  
 There prowls the rascal, cloth'd with legal pow'r,  
 To snare the orphan, and the poor devour;  
 The crafty knave his creditor besets,  
 And advertising paper pays his debts;  
 Bankrupts their creditors with rage pursue,  
 No stop, no mercy from the debtor crew.  
 Arm'd with new tests, the licens'd villain bold,  
 Presents his bills, and robs them of their gold;  
 Their ears, though rogues and counterfeiters lose,  
 No legal robber fears the gallows noose.

Look through the State, the unhallow'd ground appears  
 A pen of dragons, and a cave for bears;  
 A nest of vipers, mix'd with adders foul;  
 The screeching night-bird, and the greater owl:  
 For now, unrighteousness, a deluge wide,  
 Pours round the land an overwhelming tide;  
 And dark injustice, wrapp'd in paper sheets,  
 Rolls a dread torrent through the wasted streets;  
 While net of law th' unwary fry draw in  
 To damning deeds, and scarce they know they sin.  
 New paper struck, new tests, new tenders made,  
 Insult mankind, and help the thriving trade.  
 Each weekly print new lists of cheats proclaims,  
 Proud to enroll their knav'ries and their names;  
 The wiser race, the snares of law to shun,  
 Like lot from Sodom, from Rhode Island run.

## IN OLD PAWTUXET

by HORACE G. BELCHER

HANDED DOWN from generation to generation in one of the oldest of Pawtuxet families is a tradition which had its beginning in the days when vessels from that Rhode Island village were frequent visitors in the ports of the West Indies and our southern states. Among the members of the family was a lively, spirited lad, who with his associates used to annoy an old woman who lived at the edge of the village. They would jeer at her when they caught her outside her house and steal up after darkness to rap on her windows.

She was a lone body, making a scant living by gathering herbs and simples in the woods for their medicinal value, concocting healing salves and potions from them and selling them to villagers.

She was at once respected and feared—respected for her ability to heal fevers and agues, feared for her ability to cast spells, for it was a day when any crone who lived alone with only a pair of cats for company was distrusted. That she knew more of the medicinal virtues of common plants that grew all around than most doctors did, only added to the distrust in which she was held. Yet more than once, when the doctor seemed to have failed, she had been called on to break a fever with her herbs.

Young women, it was said, went to her for love potions, and it was generally believed that the draft she furnished when she was in the mood, would work wonders in securing or retaining a young man's affections. But behind her back some of the villagers called her a witch, and most of the boys, this lad among them, even did so to her face, while keeping out of reach. They used to come stealing up to her house at night and set a ticktack on the window, to see her come rushing out while they hid in the darkness and jeered at her.

A group of boys were annoying her one evening when she opened her door suddenly and ran out at them before they expected it. This boy was one of them and was taken by surprise and almost caught. She recognized him and called his name.

It was his last night on shore, for like many another Pawtuxet boy the sea was in his blood, and he had coaxed his parents to let him make his first voyage, with the captain of a Pawtuxet vessel, who was a friend of his father. His ship was to sail from Pawtuxet Cove in the morning, wind and weather permitting. His sea chest, which his



father had used before him, was in the forecastle of what he referred to as "my ship," and like almost everyone else in the village, the old woman knew this.

"Witch! Old witch!" he yelled at her, as he ran back into the darkness.

"You," she called, "I see you running to your home. Take a good look at it before you sail tomorrow, for you'll never see it again and live to get home again!" Then she turned and entered her doorway and shut the door.

It was a dispirited group of boys that met in the woods a little later. All had heard what she said; and while they did not really think it meant anything, recognizing it as a curse put on their associate, they were afraid. They agreed to say nothing about the old woman's imprecation when they went home, but someone must have talked, for most of the village knew of it by next morning when the ship sailed.

After that the old woman was avoided as much as possible in her few public appearances, and the neighborhood of her home was deserted after dark. Everyone said that of course they did not believe anything would come of it, but —

The ship was on a coasting voyage to southern ports. About the time she was due to return some of the boys of the village used to spend as much time as they could on the highlands of Warwick Downs just below Pawtuxet and on the edge of present day Gaspee Plateau. One day a boy came running up to a group standing on Pawtuxet bridge with the news that the ship had been sighted just below Namquit (now Gaspee Point) and would soon dock. By the time she had sailed up the channel and rounded into Pawtuxet Cove, a number of the villagers had gathered and were waiting.

The lad on the ship, who had been cursed by the witch before he set sail, had meanwhile worked off his first depression. At the start of the voyage he had been reluctant to go aloft and had used extra care in everything he did. But as time went on and nothing happened to him, he forgot his fears. He began to enjoy the voyage, for he was a born seaman. He was in high spirits as the ship came up to her anchorage in the cove.

He ran nimbly up the ratlines to a perch on the crosstrees where he could see his home. The other members of the crew watched him while going about their duties — and waited.

He called down to them so loudly that he was heard on shore, "She said I'd never see home again and live to get there, but there it is, and we're home again! We're home!"

He turned to wave at the seamen on the deck far below or perhaps at someone he recognized on shore. Suddenly he lost his hold on the mast and fell.

They picked up his crushed and broken body and carried it ashore to the home he was to see, but never to return to alive. The prophecy had been fulfilled.

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#### NEWS - NOTE

The Society has been fortunate in the receipt of two legacies of early American furniture. From the estate of the late Henry A. Hoffman of Litchfield, Connecticut, have come about forty very fine pieces, mostly of colonial Rhode Island origin. One of the third floor rooms has been redecorated and furnished with a part of this collection, and other pieces have been placed in the dining room and the back parlor. Under the will of Dr. Louisa Paine Tingley of Providence and Boston the Society was given a choice of furniture and household effects from the estate in addition to a monetary legacy. The third floor room used by various patriotic organizations will be refurnished with the pieces chosen from Dr. Tingley's collection.

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Browns of Providence Plantations: Colonial Years*, by James B. Hedges. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1952. xviii, 379 p., \$6.00.

The Brown family of Providence and its business activities, 1723-1787, are the subjects of Professor Hedges' latest book, the first in a projected three volume series. James Brown, starting as a small trader in 1723, built up a respectable business which his younger brother, Obadiah, directed between 1739 and 1764, during which time he trained his successors—four sons of James; Nicholas, Joseph, John, and the durable Moses, the Quaker pioneer with Samuel Slater in cotton manufacture, who died in 1836, age ninety-eight.

Prudence, close attention to details, personal management, and steady application characterized the Browns' methods and explain why their business developed steadily from modest beginnings. Without the benefit of much formal education, James began as a local trader and then found a larger field in a simple, two-way traffic with the West Indies, with emphasis on Dutch Surinam. Obadiah established the family's important spermaceti candle manufactory in 1753 or 1754; about twelve years later the brothers entered the iron business, erecting Hope Furnace for producing pig iron; in the late 1760's they featured direct importations of British goods from London in order to free Providence of its former dependence on Boston importers.

Caution against both overexpansion and reckless speculation was combined with a careful scrutiny of business trends and success in making adjustments to new conditions. From the start the business partook of hazards, uncertainties, and emergencies. War plagued the Browns during twenty-six of the sixty-four years treated by Mr. Hedges. In peacetime they had to contend with unfavorable British measures: first, the Molasses Act; then the laws that provoked the Revolutionary War. Enemy privateers, hostile customs officers, shortages of hard money, depreciating paper currencies, bad markets, and lost vessels kept them alert in a capricious world. It was something of a family trait to bear with resignation misfortunes that could not be foreseen or prevented. A strong feeling of family solidarity and an urge to maintain family continuity prompted the seniors to train the younger members thoroughly in the methods of the business. The four sons of James succeeded in apportioning tasks in such a way as to utilize the special talents of each. Credit being a principal factor in trade, they were careful to preserve their ability to buy at favorable times by maintaining their reputation for prompt payment. They also insisted that their debtors should pay. Most of them were shrewd judges of the quality of merchandise and therefore good bargainers. Bearers of the liberal tradition of the Reformation, they exhibited a continuing interest in public affairs, religion, philosophy, technology, and education. They were serious men who believed that life should be dignified by constructive work.

Mr. Hedges' discussion of the slave trade may inadvertently imply that it was carried on chiefly by Rhode Islanders, including the Browns, whereas their part in it was small compared with that of British merchants. It is regrettable that the study does not give data on the profits of trade or periodic estimates

of the size of the family fortune. The records of one venture undertaken for the Continental Congress show little, if any, profit. One would like to know how the Browns mastered the difficulties of dealing with the various currencies of the time—British, foreign, and colonial. What rules guided them in receiving and exchanging a variety of currencies, many of fluctuating value?

The book contains a wealth of information concerning the business practices of the eighteenth century. It describes clearly the economy of Rhode Island and explains its relation to the African-West Indian-North American-British quadrangle of commerce. It traces the rise of Providence to commercial importance—a result for which the Browns were largely responsible. Since the methods, conditions, and problems which Mr. Hedges describes were characteristic of an era, his study has a value that transcends the record of one family, colony, or town. An outstanding achievement, it is a major contribution to the economic and business history of eighteenth century America.

Particularly valuable are the accounts of the manufacturing enterprises of the Browns in chapters 5 and 6. Because both their commercial and industrial pursuits did not conform to the requirements of Britain's colonial policies, it is not strange that they participated actively in the resistance that culminated in the Revolutionary War. A significant part of the story tells how John Brown instigated the decisive attack on the British armed schooner, *Gaspee*, in June 1772. The book as a whole makes clear the advantages which were promised to American entrepreneurs by national independence, a national economy, and a national government, even though Rhode Island was not typical of the northern colonies as a whole. Three chapters on that late *terra incognita*, business enterprise in the Revolutionary War, provide a valuable supplement to Robert A. East's recent study of that subject. After the War the Browns took the "conservative" side in the struggle over paper currency and banks. Their experiences with the erratic paper money of Rhode Island made them skeptical of government as an issuer of bills of credit. The threat of a new flood of paper moved Nicholas Brown to put aside his aversion to a federal impost and to support the Federal Constitution.

Mr. Hedges' scholarship is of the lavish sort. It is meticulous in accuracy, judicious in statement, and scrupulous in the use of evidence. His writing—clear, forceful, precise, and readable—succeeds in making a technical subject alive and interesting, without sacrificing accuracy or completeness. Much thought appears to have gone into the study. The discussions are not overloaded with detail, yet each subject is developed adequately in a concise, coherent manner that enables the reader to get the essentials without doing the work that the author should do.

CURTIS P. NETTELS

Cornell University

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY



LECTURES

September 24, 1952, Wednesday 8:15 p.m.

Rhode Island Historical Society: An Appraisal

EARLE W. NEWTON, Director  
Old Sturbridge Village

October 8, 1952, Wednesday 8:15 p.m.

Religious Liberty in Rhode Island and Maryland

FATHER JOSEPH HUGH BERGKAMP, Head of the  
Department of History and Government  
Providence College

November 9, 1952, Sunday 2:15 p.m.

A Visit to Auton House

MISS NANCY A. DYER

January 14, 1953, Wednesday 8:15 p.m.

STATED MEETING

The Pequot Path

GEORGE L. MINER  
Author of *Angell's Lane*

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

*Except holidays*

Monday through Friday nine to five

Sunday afternoon three to five

*Library only*

Tuesday evening seven to nine

*Closed Sundays and Tuesday evenings,  
June, July, and August*