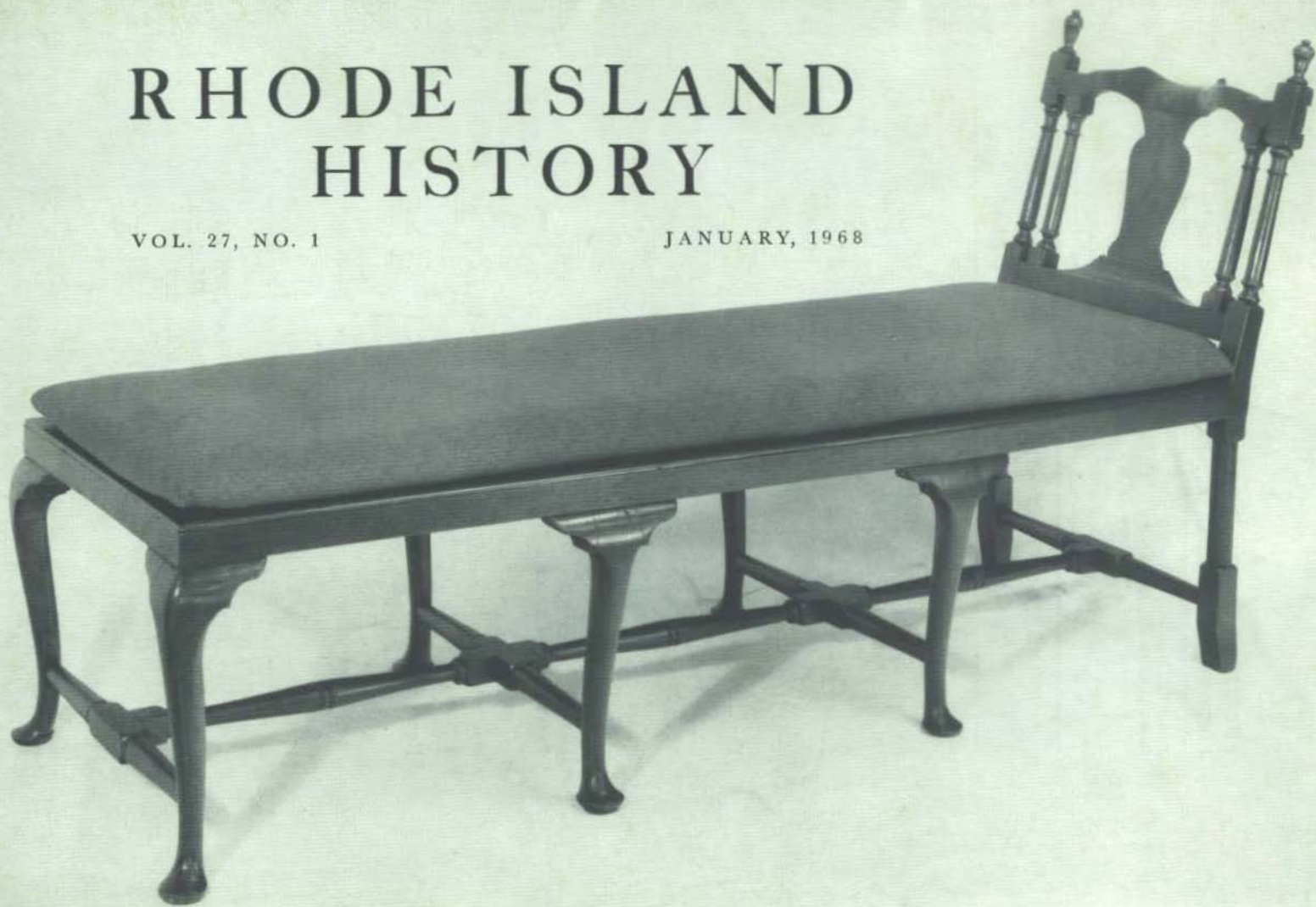


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COVER

Daybed, Rhode Island, probably Newport, 1740-1760.
Walnut, secondary wood: maple. Height: 37"; height
of seat: 17"; length: 71"; width: 22".

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JOSEPH BROWN, ASTRONOMER

by STUART F. CRUMP, JR.

DOCTOR J. WALTER WILSON has noted that all of the faculty at Brown University before 1790, with the exception of President Manning, were science professors. These men were David Howell, Joseph Brown, Benjamin Waterhouse, Benjamin West, and Perez Fobes. No doubt, Joseph Brown had much to do with establishing this trend.¹

Born on December 3, 1733, Joseph Brown was the son of James Brown and Hope (Power) Brown, and second oldest of the four Brown brothers, "Nick and Joe and John and Moe." His father, a merchant in Providence, died when Joseph was five, and the boy was brought up by his mother. It is interesting to note that he was a "consistent member of the Baptist Church, being the only one of the brothers who ever made a public profession of religion."² A testimonial to him written shortly after his death reads: "His Skill and Industry, in the earlier part of Life, in the Merchandize and Manufactures in which he was concerned, had rendered his Circumstances easy, if not affluent, and enabled him to indulge his natural Taste for Science."³ Yet Joseph apparently had less interest in business than did his three brothers, and he spent a great deal of his time in intellectual pursuit. Professor Hedges points out that none of his business

¹J. Walter Wilson, "Joseph Brown, Scientist and Architect," *Rhode Island History*, July and October 1945, p. 69.

²Reuben Aldridge Guild, *Life, Times, and Correspondence of James Manning and the Early History of Brown University* (Boston, Gould and Lincoln, 1864), p. 162 (hereafter cited as *Manning and B.U.*).

³*Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, December 10, 1785 (hereafter cited as *Gazette*). Original and microfilm in The Rhode Island Historical Society Library.

letters has survived, if indeed he ever wrote any.⁴ His mind tended more toward science and mechanics than to trade and commerce.

On September 30, 1759, he married Elizabeth, daughter of Nicholas Power. They had four children, Mary, Obidiah, Eliza, and Joseph.

Though he was never a professional scientist of the type we have today, he was an enthusiastic amateur. His interest in electricity, for example, was probably aroused by an advertisement that appeared in 1764:

For the Entertainment of the CURIOUS, will be exhibited at the Court-House, a course of experiments in that instructive and entertaining Branch of natural Philosophy, call'd Electricity, to be accompanied with LECTURES on the Nature and Property of the Electric Fire; by William Johnson . . . As the Knowledge of Nature tends to enlarge the human Mind, and give us more noble and exalted Ideas of the GOD OF NATURE, it is hoped that this Course will prove, to many, an agreeable Entertainment.⁵

Joseph Brown played an important part in getting Rhode Island College, now Brown University, under way. He was a trustee from 1769 until his death. An account of the second commencement mentions that ". . . the degree of Master [of Arts was conferred] on the Rev. Isaac Eaton, Messieurs William Bowen, Benjamin West, David Williams, Joseph Brown, and Abel Evans."⁶ This was an honorary degree. Actually, Brown had very little formal education. Evidence of this may be seen in any of his letters; they are full of mistakes in spelling and grammar and are very poorly written, even in excess of the typical eighteenth-century letter. As the testimonial to him at the time of his death pointed out, "the Want of an early Education was an Obstacle in the Way of his literary Career; but the Efforts of his Genius in surmounting it excited the greater Admiration."⁷ He was elected to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

When, during the war, French soldiers left the College ruined, and

⁴James B. Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations: Colonial Years* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 12.

⁵*Gazette*, March 3, 1764.

⁶Reuben Aldridge Guild, *Early History of Brown University including the Life, Times, and Correspondence of President Manning* (Providence, Brown University, 1897), pp. 164-165 (hereafter cited as *B. U. and Manning*).

⁷*Gazette*, December 10, 1785.

it was without funds and faculty, Joseph Brown and Benjamin Waterhouse volunteered to teach without pay. The *Gazette* of September 4, 1784, lists Brown's appointment as professor of experimental philosophy. He was thus the second professor appointed by the trustees.⁸ Unfortunately, he had a stroke on November 24, 1784, and he was never able to fill his appointment. Though he partially recovered and lingered for a little over a year, "a hope of his restoration to former usefulness"⁹ was futile, and he passed away on his birthday, December 3, 1785. One obituary reported: "Saturday Evening last departed this Life, in 52d Year of his Age, JOSEPH BROWN, Esq.; for many Years a very respectable Merchant of this Town; and Yesterday his Remains were decently interred at the North Burial-Place."¹⁰ The normal obituary at the time was very short, something like the above. Another and much longer tribute was unusual indeed and was later reprinted as a broadside.¹¹

Though Joseph Brown never lectured, there can be no doubt that his effect on students was great, long before his appointment as professor. Solomon Drowne, of the class of 1773, mentions Brown and astronomy several times in his *Journal*:

(September 1771) 28th: . . . Spend This Week . . . working upon my wooden Telescope.

(November 1771) 6th: . . . This afternoon was an Eclipse of the Sun, which would have been visible, had not the sun been totally Eclipsed by intervening Clouds . . .

(April 1772) 26th: . . . Talk with Mr. Brown concerning the Prism . . .

(August 1772) 3d: This Morning at about 8 the Senior and

⁸There appears to be some question as to who was the first. President Manning wrote on August 3, 1784, to John Rippon: "I forgot to mention that the Hon. Joseph Brown, a member of the Corporation, a philosophical genius, was at our last meeting chosen Professor of Experimental Philosophy in this College; and Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, M.D., of Leyden, was chosen Professor of Natural History, both of whom engaged to give lectures in their respective branches, without any expense to the College while destitute of an endowment" (*B. U. and Manning*, p. 381). However, Guild points out in *Manning and B. U.* (p. 162) that David Howell was the first professor appointed by the Corporation. All three were probably appointed at about the same time.

⁹James Manning, letter "To the Honorable David Howell, Member of Congress in Philadelphia," December 23, 1784 (*B. U. and Manning*, p. 397).

¹⁰*United States Chronicle* (Providence), December 8, 1785.

¹¹*Gazette*, December 10, 1785.

Junior Classes go down to Mr. Brown's Apparatus, at the Works, to attend electrical and *Philosophical* Lectures. Mr. Hoell [David Howell] present. In the Forenoon and part of the Afternoon try electrical Experiments. Kill a Pigeon, &c. then darken the Room to construct the Camera Obscura which affords very pretty Diversion as some go out and ride, play, &c. & David stands upon his Head. We then carry out the Telescope and Micrometer up on the Hill and look at the Sun as long as we could see him, then at the Moon, then Stars and lastly the Planet Jupiter, 3 of whose Moons we see.¹²

This last entry actually shows in operation the telescope and micrometer which had been used to observe the Transit of Venus in 1769.

It is worth observing that when each of the four Brown brothers contributed 200 pounds toward the building of University Hall, Joseph gave only 100 in cash. The other hundred was "to be paid in philosophical apparatus . . . as soon as a proper place is provided to put them in."¹³

It might also be worth mentioning some of Joseph Brown's other achievements. Along with Stephen Hopkins and the Rev. John Davis, he was on "a committee to draught instructions and prepare a model of the house proposed to be erected, which, if approved by the Corporation, is to serve as directions to the committee appointed to carry the same into execution." The report was accepted, and it was "Voted, That the Chancellor, the President, and Mr. Joseph Brown be a committee to prepare a complete model of the building."¹⁴ This structure, now University Hall (National Historic Landmark, June 1962), graces the Brown University campus. Joseph Brown also designed or helped to design four other buildings in Providence. They are the Market Building, his own house on South Main Street, the John Brown House (now the headquarters and museum of The Rhode Island Historical Society), and the First Baptist Meeting House (National Historic Landmark, October 1960).¹⁵

¹²Marion E. Brown, ed., *Solomon Drowne, Student: His Papers and Journals, 1753-1774* (Providence, M.A. Thesis in American Civilization, 1954), pp. 54, 59, 89, 110-111. Original ms. in Archives, John Hay Library, Brown University.

¹³Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

¹⁴Reuben Aldridge Guild, *History of Brown University with Illustrative Documents* (Providence, Providence Press Company, 1867), pp. 230-231.

¹⁵For further information on these buildings or on Joseph Brown as an architect, consult any of the books listed by Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

According to the *Gazette* obituary, "his favourite Study was Mechanics; in this was the great Strength of his Genius discovered, Proofs of which, honorary to his Memory, are left behind him." Two contemporary accounts of one of his "Proofs" describe the "famous steam engine at Cranston . . . the only one in America," referring to the steam engine used to drain mines, designed by Joseph Brown, consisting mostly of improvements on Newcomen's steam engine. Manasseh Cutler mentioned that "this curious machine was made under the direction of Mr. Joseph Brown, of Providence, and is a standing proof of the abilities of that able philosopher. The invention was not new, but he has made many valuable improvements, in simplifying and making the working of it more convenient, above what has yet been done in Europe."¹⁶

Count Luigi Castiglioni, only recently published in English, stated that "this machine was built by the brother of its present possessor with the knowledge he obtained from books about similar machines built in Europe, making a number of changes to adapt, with great ingenuity, to the circumstances of this country,"¹⁷ and went on to describe the machine in detail.

Joseph Brown also designed a fire engine, "the first ever made in this Town."¹⁸ Dr. Wilson says that the steam engine and the fire engine show evidence of "a thoroughgoing understanding of mechanical principles and their application."¹⁹

Brown also conducted experiments with ships,²⁰ electricity and cannon,²¹ and probably other things. Included in his will are quite a number of books on science: "Martin Philosophy 3 Vol.; Emerson's

¹⁶William Parker Cutler and Julia Perkins Cutler, *Life, Journals, and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler, LL.D.*, 2v. (Cincinnati, Clarke, 1888), v. 1, p. 207.

¹⁷Samuel Hough, "Castiglioni's Visit to Rhode Island," *Rhode Island History*, April 1967 (translation and annotation of chapters on Rhode Island in Luigi Castiglioni, *Viaggio negli Stati Uniti dell' America Settentrionale fatto negli anni, 1785, 1786 e 1787 . . . con alcune osservazioni sui vegetabili piu utili de quel paese [Travels in the United States of North America made in the years 1785, 1786, and 1787 . . . with some observations on the most useful plants of that country]*, 2v., Milano, 1790), p. 56.

¹⁸Marion E. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-86.

¹⁹Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

²⁰Letter by Joseph Brown, September 8, 1782, Archives, John Hay Library.

²¹Dr. Wilson gives a good account of these. The letter of September 8, 1782 [note 20], also describes an experiment with static electricity.

Mechanics; Priestly on Electricity; Dictionary of Arts and Sciences 4 Vol.; Longs Astronomy 2 Vol.; Derham's (?) Astronomy; Tunnin on Algebra; Wilson on Navigation; Institute of Chemistry 2 Vol.; Watts on Astronomy." Also two items of interest, "a Barometer out of Order; 1 Thermometer."²²

Thus far we have examined aspects of Joseph Brown's life apart from his work in astronomy. His role in the observation at Providence of the 1769 Transit of Venus has been described several times,²³ but never, so far as I know, have all the documents been taken together.

The importance of the 1769 Transit should not be underestimated. Donald Fleming writes:

In eighteenth-century America the symbolic act of allegiance to science and learning was the observation of the transit of Venus in 1769 . . . For their ostensible purpose, determining the scale of the solar system, these observations left much to be desired; but they had something to do with the Anglicizing of Australia in the eighteenth century and the invention of motion pictures in the nineteenth, and above all, they supplied a mold for the casting and pooling of communal energy.²⁴

When transits of Venus occur, they take place in pairs, eight years apart. There had been a transit in 1761 (the second ever to be observed; in all of history only five have been seen and recorded), the results of which, unfortunately, had been inconclusive. In 1769 astronomers had a second chance, so to speak, to get the answer they sought. Benjamin West wrote:

From these observations we expect to discover the distance of the Earth, the Planets and Comets, from the Sun; and consequently their magnitudes and quantity of matter will be known, as also their proportion of light and heat — These things being once known, Astronomers in future will be able, from the like observations, to discover whether the Earth and Planets approach the Sun, or recede from him; and whether the Sun be diminished

²²Will of Joseph Brown, March 30, 1785, photocopy of original, The Rhode Island Historical Society Library.

²³Albert E. Lownes, "The 1769 Transit of Venus," *Sky and Telescope*, II, 6, pp. 3-5. Harry Woolf, *The Transits of Venus, A Study of Eighteenth-Century Science* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1959), pp. 173-174. Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74.

²⁴Donald Fleming, *Science and Technology in Providence: 1760-1914* (Providence, Brown University, 1952), p. 13. Some of these claims are documented in Woolf, *op. cit.*

by its constant expence of light and heat. From a knowledge of all these things, methinks we shall have such a demonstration of the existence of a GOD, who made and governs all things, that even the reformed atheist must tremble when he reflects on his past conduct.²⁵

In short, these astronomers of the Enlightenment hoped to solve the "final" problem of astronomy — the size of the solar system — and "to complete the Newtonian system of the world by determining its actual scalar dimensions."²⁶ For this purpose, nineteen or more observations were made in the English colonies of North America alone, and at least one hundred fifty separate attempts were made by scientists around the world.²⁷ Donald Fleming calls the Providence observations "the most striking single episode in the history of science in colonial Providence."²⁸ Incidentally, Transit Street was so named because the observation took place there, near Benefit Street.²⁹ The story of the observation follows:

Joseph Brown read John Winthrop's account of the transit of 1761 and, realizing the importance of the 1769 transit, sent to London for a telescope. At the meeting of the Corporation of the college on September 7, 1768, the "Corporation . . . voted that the President write to Mr. [Morgan] Edwards to purchase for an Air Pump, a Telescope and a Microscope out of the Monies at any Time in his Hands by the Consent of the Donors & that this Corporation will replace said Money if required out of the Fund raised or to be raised in this Country."³⁰ Interestingly enough, Joseph Brown is not listed among those who "were Present" at this meeting. Anyway, according to West, "afterwards, taking notice of the application of the American Philosophical Society to the Assembly of Pennsylvania, for an apparatus for observing the Transit of Venus, he found the orders he had sent were incompleat: He then advised with the author [West], as

²⁵Benjamin West, *An Account of the Observation of Venus upon the Sun, the third day of June, 1769, at Providence, in New England* (Providence, John Carter, 1769), pp. ii-iii. Original in John Hay Library.

²⁶Woolf, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 170, 182-187.

²⁸Fleming, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

²⁹"Transit Street — Origin of its Name," *Providence Journal*, October 23, 1855 (clipping on file in John Carter Brown Library).

³⁰Corporation Minutes, September 7, 1768, vol. I, p. 31, ms., Archives, John Hay Library.

mentioned, and thereupon ordered a micrometer to be added. — Mr. Brown's expence, in this laudable undertaking, was little less than One Hundred Pounds, sterling, besides near a month's time of himself and servants, in making the necessary previous experiments and preparations."³¹

The instruments for the observation arrived "about one month" before the transit. West wrote that "it consisted of a three feet reflecting telescope, with horizontal and vertical wires for taking differences of altitudes and azimuths, adjusted with spirit-levels at right angles, and a divided arch for taking altitudes; a curious helioscope, together with a micrometer of a new and elegant construction, with rack motions, fitted to the telescope."³² Also included were a sextant and "two good clocks." Lownes notes that the Providence observers seem to have had the only helioscope.³³

Though Brown was the prime mover for the observation, Benjamin West directed the proceedings. It was a joint effort and could not have been successful without the talents and backing of both men. It is not fair to attempt to dismiss Brown's part, as did the Reverend David Rowland, pastor of the First Congregationalist Church in Providence, in a letter to Ezra Stiles. Rowland wrote that West's "marginal notes which are designed to do so much honor to Mr. Brown were forced in [to the pamphlet] by him, contrary to Mr. West's Inclination, and what was really just and right; and the advantage taken because Mr. West's circumstances were low and he was not able to support the press."³⁴ Dr. Wilson explains that there was high feeling between the Congregationalists and the Baptists at the time, and that West was a Congregationalist and Brown a Baptist. He says, "I haven't a doubt but that without West's astronomical and mathematical knowledge the observations could not have been made. Nor that without Joseph Brown's inspiration, financial backing, and also skill and contrivance in manipulating the apparatus, they would not have been undertaken nor completed."³⁵

Assisting West and Brown were Stephen Hopkins, Moses Brown, Dr. Jabez Bowen, Joseph Nash, and Captain John Burrough. David

³¹West, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 11.

³³Lownes, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

³⁴Franklin Bowditch Dexter, ed., *Extracts from the Itineraries and Other Miscellanies of Ezra Stiles, D.D., LL.D., 1755-1794, with a Selection from His Correspondence* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1916), p. 562.

³⁵Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

Howell was also there, according to his letter of June 5, 1769.³⁶

Preparations were begun about a month in advance. Latitude and longitude were determined, clocks were regulated to an accuracy of one second, the instruments were readied. The third of June arrived. "All was calm, and not a cloud to be seen."³⁷ Each necessary task was assigned to one of the gentlemen. A short newspaper report printed one week later mentioned that "the Apparatus used on the Occasion is extremely accurate and curious, and was lately imported from England for that Purpose by the ingenious JOSEPH BROWN, Esq.; to whom the Public are much indebted."³⁸ In solving one of the most important problems, Brown indeed displayed his ingenuity:

The latitude of the place being of great consequence, and the sextant and stile not giving it exactly alike, the persevering Mr. BROWN contrived to make use of the micrometer as a lens, when he placed on his house, twenty-seven feet high, and exactly perpendicular to a center on a horizontal platform below, on which was drawn a meridian line; the Sun's image on this platform was seen to move very sensibly. — By this the latitude was finally determined. The Sun's meridian altitude, being taken for several days by this long stile, the latitudes thence found did not differ from each other more than 15 seconds. — At the time this was done, we had seen no account that a glass had been made use of, as here described; but since this went to the press, we learn from Dr. LONG's astronomy, that he found the latitude of Cambridge, in England, by the same method.³⁹

All observations thus completed, West published his famous pamphlet. Aside from newspaper accounts, it was the first of the findings published and the only one published independently. West's account concludes, "When the Sun's parallax is known, the distance of the earth, and of all the planets, from the Sun, will be known likewise." Joseph Brown must have been well aware of this, and he must have been pleased with the findings that he labored so long and hard to procure. An abstract of West's report appeared in the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*. The notes at the beginning state:

As it appears by some letters of the Astronomer Royal, which have been communicated to this Society, that most of the

³⁶Lownes mentions this letter on p. 5, *op. cit.*, but I am unable to find the original or a copy.

³⁷West, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

³⁸*Gazette*, June 10, 1769.

³⁹West, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

Northern Observers, both in Russia and Sweden, were greatly disappointed, by the unfavorable state of the weather, in their noble and public spirited endeavors to observe the late Transit; the *American* Observations have become of greater importance, in order to a comparison with those of Greenwich, and therefore the Society think it very material to preserve their Transactions, such of the observations made on the Continent as they have been favored with. The Account of the *Providence* Observations, drawn up by Mr. WEST, was transmitted by Mr. JOSEPH BROWN, and being laid before the Society by Dr. SMITH: the following Abstract thereof was ordered to be published at a Meeting, May 18th, 1770.⁴⁰

Brown probably played an important part in seeing to it that West published his findings and, again, supplied financial backing.

As a result of observing the transit, Lownes says "American Astronomy came of age. Rarely has a single event so affected the course of a science." He further notes that "the American observations were among the best [in the world]."⁴¹

There are but sketchy records of any other astronomical observations Brown might have performed. Since his only published paper is very short, somewhat difficult to obtain, and also of interest to us, it is here in its entirety:

An Observation of a Solar Eclipse, October 27, 1780, at Providence. By JOSEPH BROWN, Esquire.

My apparatus for the observation of the solar eclipse was a three-foot reflecting telescope, with spirit levels; a small graduated semi-circle of about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches radius, and rack motions for taking altitudes; and a glass micrometer, fitted with rack motions, I believe of *Dolland's* construction, having a nonius graduated to $1/500$ part of an inch: A reflecting telescope of near two feet; and a prospect-glass of three feet four inches length, which I mounted on a convenient stand.

On the 20th, I moved my clock into a convenient part of my house; and from that time to the day of the eclipse, I was constantly employed in taking corresponding altitudes of the sun

⁴⁰West, "An Abstract of Mr. BENJAMIN WEST'S Account of the Transit of Venus, as observed at *Providence* in New England, June 3d, 1769," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. I, January 1, 1769, to January 1, 1771.

⁴¹Lownes, *op. cit.*, pp. 3, 5.

with my telescope, and constructing a meridian-line.

Our observations of the eclipse were as follows
The beginning was not accurately noted.

First seen in correct time,	10h 58' 8"
Just touches a black spot in or near the middle of a macula at the right hand,	11 21 32
Just touches the first of four spots all nearly in a range in a macula at the left hand,	11 30 52
Ditto the spot nearest the centre of the sun's disc,	11 35 20
The end of the eclipse as seen by Mr. West in the small telescope,	1 39 1
Ditto by my brother in the spy-glass,	1 39 8
Ditto last seen by myself in the largest reflector,	1 39 16

I took the diameter of the sun while the eclipse was on, and made it three inches and $434/500$; which, by my table, constructed in the year 1769, previous to the transit of Venus, makes the sun's apparent diameter $32' 18''$: And the smallest I saw the bright part of the sun was $140/500$ of an inch: So small I am certain it was, and it might probably be a very little less, tho' I believe this to be pretty exact; and this, I think, makes the sun to be 11 digits and $3/10$ eclipsed, or very nearly so.⁴²

I leave it to the reader to decide for himself to what extent scientific competency is demonstrated by that paper. Benjamin West's account of a later eclipse is published in the same volume. West goes into considerably more mathematical detail. The following, however, is of interest, since it shows Brown and West at work together:

This eclipse was observed in *Providence* by Mr. Joseph Brown and myself, at Mr. Brown's house. The morning of the 23d of April was cloudy, and despaired of seeing the sun that day; but a little before twelve o'clock, the clouds seemed to break, and the sun, now and then, made its appearance, which gave me some hopes of seeing some part of the eclipse: . . . The air continued unfavourable to our observation till a few minutes before the middle of the eclipse, when the sun again appeared, and gave us a good opportunity of observing the quantity of the eclipse when at the greatest;— for which purpose, Mr. Brown applied the

⁴²Joseph Brown, "An Observation of a Solar Eclipse, October 27, 1780, at Providence," *Memoirs of the American Academy*, Vol. I, 1785, pp. 149-150.

micrometer, and found the lucid part of the sun, when in its last state, 1288 micrometer measure. This was not done at a single operation, but by a number of trials, till he found the bright part of the sun was in its least state. After reading off the numbers from the micrometer for the quantity of the eclipse, Mr. Brown immediately, at my request, took the length of the chord joining the cusps, which I believe was done with great care, and found it 1380 . . .

Mr. Brown and myself both noted the same second for the last contact, which was at 2h 53' 36" apparent time. There were some thin white clouds about the sun, yet I think the observation was pretty good.⁴³

Additional information concerning Joseph Brown's work in astronomy is furnished in a letter by him to David Howell, July 13, 1782, concerning repair of the telescope, and in two short manuscripts, one of them possibly in the hand of Brown, consisting of a description of the reflecting telescope, and the other giving directions on how to use the micrometer, both written about 1783.⁴⁴

No more fitting conclusion occurs to the writer than that of Dr. Wilson: "No one would claim that Joseph Brown became a great scientist, and it would be a mistake to imply that he was of great importance in the history of science. His importance was not that of the spectacular discoverer of fact or theory but rather that of the many quiet men who by their intellectual activity and interest keep the fires of scholarship alive and pass them on to be fanned by the drafts of greater genius."⁴⁵

⁴³West, "An Account of the Observations in Providence, in the State of Rhode-Island, of the Eclipse of the Sun which happened the 23d Day of April, 1781. By BENJAMIN WEST, Esquire, F. A. A. Communicated by the Reverend President WILLARD," *Memoirs of the American Academy*, Vol. I, 1785, pp. 156-158.

⁴⁴Mss., Archives, John Hay Library.

⁴⁵Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 128.



DIRECTOR'S NEWSLETTER

THE PUBLICATION COMMITTEE has decided to discontinue the *President's Newsletter* and to include in the Society's quarterly a *Director's Newsletter* that will tell the members of the various changes and expansions of programs. I am glad to be able to inform the members of the Society's progress.

The Rhode Island Historical Society again has affirmed its primary role as collecting and preserving important Rhode Island material, and informing its members and others about Rhode Island's aesthetic and historic past. The Executive Board has therefore established a list of regulations which make it possible for meetings, luncheons and teas to be held in John Brown House without jeopardizing the important objects which are now installed in the building, some of which are on indefinite loan, and most of which are of major historic and aesthetic importance and must be carefully protected. At present luncheons and teas may be held in the large dining room, and food and drink must be confined within the dining room or the museum area. The corrugated plastic has been removed from the floors and to insure their continued beauty, spike heels may not be worn within the house. Because of these and a few other changes a mimeographed form is now available to anyone wishing to engage the house for a special event. As announced, the Sunday afternoon lectures and the annual meeting are being held in the Library.

On the third of December Mrs. John Nicholas Brown gave a superb lecture on "The French in Newport" and the attendance made it again obvious that a lecture hall is necessary. The space available in the Library, though larger than in John Brown House, was insufficient to the need. The Development Committee is proceeding with plans for a lecture hall which will also include museum space for small objects such as pewter, ceramics, glass, textiles, military objects, furniture not appropriately displayed in the House and other Rhode Island artifacts. The design for the exterior of the new wing has been put under the care of a new committee, The John Brown House Committee, which has charge of any permanent aesthetic changes, both inside and outside, of the Society's complex.

The John Brown House Committee has begun a fundamental rethinking of John Brown House and will work room by room to

bring it back to the way it looked at the time John Brown was involved with it, between 1786 and 1803. The committee has decided to begin on the second floor in the northwest bedroom and will seal off this room and begin a detailed investigation of the woodwork, floor, paint colors and other important features. The complete reworking of the house will take many years but a good beginning has been made. The House has already undergone surface changes possible before long-term work is completed. The northeast room of the first floor has been installed as John Brown's dining room and his sideboard is now probably in its original location. The lecture hall that was on the first floor, where it eliminated any possibility that the first impact upon entering the house would be one of an early house, has been placed on the second floor directly over the former lecture hall. This attractive room is the same size as the one below and holds the same number of chairs, and it can be reached by an elevator. The Society therefore has available for lectures the upper lecture hall and the attractive Champlin Room in the basement.

The new installation of the House is in accordance with the inventories of the period. Unfortunately, we do not have an early room by room inventory of John Brown House but those of Joseph Brown's house, 1786, and the Nightingale house, 1809, bracket the dates in which John Brown used the house and by using these, along with other inventories, it is possible to make an installation of objects which truly reflects the early glory of the house. To some the new installation has been surprising; there is less furniture in each room and the paintings are hung higher to relate to the moldings of the pediments over the doors. The whole house has taken on a more open, airy quality, while achieving at the same time the strength and clarity it should have. The architectural elements begin to take a prominent role in organizing the rooms, focusing them with their decorative elements.

This rearrangement has already revealed that one of our pressing needs is for rugs made before 1803.

Other new committees have been formed. One is a subcommittee of The John Brown House Committee which has been given the responsibility of deciding what exterior planting is appropriate for a house of this date and region.

The Society has benefited by a number of significant new acqui-



Fig. 1 — Three-part dining table; labeled by John Townsend (1721-1809) of Newport, in 1797 for Major John Wood of Newport who married Rebecca Wickham in 1793. Mahogany; secondary woods: tulip poplar, chestnut and white pine. Height: 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ " ; width: 49", open: 100".

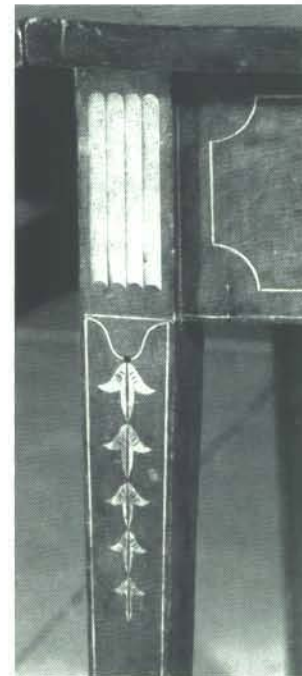


Fig. 1a — Typical John Townsend "book," "bellflower" and string inlay in figure 1.

Label on figure 1. "Made by John To(w)nsend, Newport. 1797."



tions by loan, gift and purchase. The Museum Committee has acquired for the house the important and famous three-part dining room table labeled by John Townsend and made for the Major John Wood family in Newport (figures 1 and 1a). Accompanying this table are a portrait of the original owner, miniatures of himself and his wife, and their English and American silver. A superb Rhode Island Queen Anne daybed was acquired at the same time (see cover). It is one of the three or four known Rhode Island examples of this form. Both of these new pieces were in the John Brown House Loan Exhibition and are illustrated in the catalogue. The table is installed in John Brown's dining room and the daybed in his bedroom.

Many of the papers of John Hutchins Cady have been left to the Society, and the Rhode Island Bar Association has presented to the Society the minute book of the Providence County Bar Association with records dating back to February 3, 1795.

Installed in the museum area is an exhibition of silver that belonged to John Brown; most of it is on indefinite loan from Mr. Norman Herreshoff and includes important pieces made in America, England, France and Holland. Included in the group is a dinner service of silver on copper. This service was noted in a letter from Abigail Adams to her sister after a dinner party was arranged for her in John Brown House in 1789; she reported that they "ate off a service of plate." Until this exhibition went on display just what the service of plate was had been forgotten.

Another exhibition is planned. From the time of the annual meeting, on January 21st, an exhibition of Rhode Island gravestone rubbings by Anne and Dicran Tashjian will be shown in the museum area for six weeks. This includes rubbings of gravestones of many prominent Rhode Island families, including that of Chad Brown who died before 1650. The stone was erected in 1792 by the city of Providence.

The Board also plans to expand the Society's program to make available to the members a wider range of lectures and materials. Various lecture series are being offered and material already owned by the Society is being catalogued. New staff is necessary and the Executive Board was sure that the members would wish to support an expanding, active Society, and because of the increase in all expenses, the Board has voted to increase the dues of the Society.

Unfortunately the printer made two mistakes in a recent mailing and left out the word "Island" on both the dues form and the outer envelope. The Society has been asked, I hope with humor, whether it is changing its name to "Rhode Historical Society." This, of course, is neither the plan nor the wish of the Executive Board, nor of the Director! If there has been some confusion over this change in dues and manner of payment I trust that the members will bear with us as we proceed to simplify the immense problem of recording and supervising membership. At present it involves endless hours and continuous labor. Part of the simplification has been a vote by the Publication Committee to have the quarterly appear during the Fall, twice during the Winter, and in the Spring, rather than having a publication during the Summer when many members are at a different address necessitating much redirection of the Bulletin.

To help meet costs and to reflect the trend of other historic houses and museums, the Executive Board has decided to make a charge of \$1.00 for adults and 25c for children to nonmembers who wish to see the House. A membership card, which will be mailed to members before the ruling goes into effect in the Spring, will assure members free access to their building. There will of course be no charge for the Library.

The Society needs your support as we seek to expand the activities of the Society. We desperately need volunteer docents to act as guides or as volunteers assisting the staff in John Brown House and in the Library, and one of the winter courses is designed to give background information to prospective docents. There are endless details that need attention and we cannot achieve what must be done without your support.

It is my sincere hope that you will come and see what is happening at John Brown House as all these new ideas and programs begin to affect your Society and that you will take an active part in both directing them and in carrying them out.

"THE PUBLICK UNIVERSAL FRIEND"

by J. BRUCE WHYTE

Communications Specialist, Leeson Corporation

[concluded from October, 1967, p. 112]

IN CONSEQUENCE OF the angry feelings toward her and her sect, Jemima decided to settle a colony in which the United Friends would be free from intruders. In 1786 she sent Ezekiel Shearman to explore the regions of upper New York State. After Shearman had returned with reports of a promising land, a committee comprising Thomas Hathaway, Richard Smith and Abraham Dayton, was appointed to do further exploration. The group investigated the Pennsylvania interior, then followed the route of General Sullivan's army to Kanasaga, in New York. They traveled on to Kashong, where they were entertained by the French traders, Poudre and De Bartzch.²⁴ The three men returned to the Friend and, when their reports confirmed those of Shearman, the Friend prepared to send forth a settling party.

In June 1788, twenty-five members gathered at Schenectady, where they made preparations for their journey, and in August, the group arrived at City Hill, about one mile south of the present Dresden, New York.²⁵

They planted their first crops and, in 1789, they harvested twelve acres of wheat. The same year, Richard Smith, James Parker, and Abraham Dayton constructed a grist mill — the first to be raised in New York, west of Seneca Lake.²⁶ A saw mill was erected, and the settlers began to build their first frame houses.

Sarah Richards, the chief adviser of the sect, traveled to City Hill in 1789, to report back to Jemima conditions there. For some reason, she disliked what she saw and left the sect altogether.

In 1790, the Universal Friend removed to the new colony, which at the time numbered two-hundred and sixty inhabitants.

The Indians accepted the Friend from the first time she appeared among them. They called her "Shinneevanagis-taw-ge," or the Great Woman Preacher.²⁷ In 1791, Jemima accompanied the Indians to Newton for the signing of the Pickering Treaty and, in 1794, she

²⁴Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 251-252.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 252.

²⁷Henricks and Potter, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

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witnessed the proceedings at Canandaigua which gave title to the Genesee Tract.

A log meetinghouse was built in 1790, and Rachel Malin opened the first school. Sarah Richards rejoined the colony in 1791 and assumed her former position as chief counselor. The United Friends had found a land which was free from intruders, but it was not long before they found their way into the Friend's colony. When land speculators crowded around the settlement, the sect moved farther west. In 1792, the Universal Friend made the first payment on the six square miles of land which she called New Jerusalem. The payment consisted of her own two oxen, her bed coverlets, and three silver spoons.²⁸

Governor Clinton signed the deed to New Jerusalem on October 10, 1792. The Friend purchased the land for twenty-five cents an acre with the provision that within seven years, one family would be settled on each six-hundred and forty acres.²⁹ By 1795, the value of the land had increased to six dollars an acre.

New Jerusalem flourished, and the Friend managed affairs with a firm hand. Atop Shepherd's Hill, she built a great mansion, which was always open to all. The house, which overlooks the beautiful Guyanoga Valley and Lake Keuka, was completed in 1796. In the foyer, the Friend stood on the stairway landing and preached to her followers. Jemima scorned the evil practice of drinking, and on occasion from her stairway pulpit, she may have been heard reciting:

From civil practices abstain, and every other sin.
From drinking whiskey, brandy, rum, likewise from Holland gin.
For it will make the rich man poor, an honest man a knave.
It will lay the rider in the ditch
The drunkard in his grave.³⁰

And the sinful deeds of women were not left to be forgotten.

Old woman next to you I call
Now take a Friend's advice
Lay by your snuff case one and all
And throw away your pipes.
Your upper lip is always duded
Your nose is tinged with red
You take a pinch in either hand

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 163.

²⁹Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

³⁰Henricks and Potter, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

Then go to mixing bread.
 Intemperance often shows itself
 In dress as well as drink.
 Young ladies this you know is true
 And from it you should shrink.
 But lacing tight is worse than all
 Beware of such a curse
 It injures health, produces death
 Oh what can there be worse.³¹

Jemima's most intimate friend, Sarah Richards, died in 1793 and, after her death, Rachel Malin became one of the greatest influences on the sect and the Friend. The sect had become more subdued when Rachel joined and the sensationalism faded. Rachel did not profess to be a prophetess. She enjoyed her life in the new settlement as is evident in the following letter to a friend in New England:

It is some years since I have bid adieu to the World and retired in to this wilderness . . . it was then that I chose the Lord for my portion, and took his love alone for my treasure . . . I think I feel myself happy in exploring those shady groves, the woods offer their shades, and the fields their harvests and the hills flatter with an extensive view, and the valley invites with shelter, fragrance, and flowers solitude is pleasant to me; this new world is richly adorned with hills and valley.³²

During the struggling first years of the new colony, the Friend retained the faith and loyalty of her people, due mainly to her good management and maternal attitude toward her followers and not so much to her religious doctrines. As prosperity began to be evident, the need for a "mother" grew less and the people grew more independent. The unmarried contemplated taking mates and, before long, intruders started to encroach upon New Jerusalem. Trouble arose within the sect during the early part of 1800, and James Parker and Judge Potter resigned.

Before Judge Potter's resignation, he secured papers from many of the colonists releasing all their lands to him. When he resigned, he charged the Friend with blasphemy and brought her before the grand jury at Canandaigua. Presiding was Judge Ambrose Spencer, who

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 161.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 163.

remarked that Jemima "was somewhat theatrical in manner and matter, and among other things asserted that if her doctrines were blasphemous, then the principal witness, Judge Potter, was a blasphemer also, for he had subscribed to all her doctrines, and had not renounced his faith."³³ Jemima's speech, although regarded as "traveling out of the record,"³⁴ won the jury, and she was acquitted. After the indictment was dropped, Jemima was asked to speak. When she finished her sermon, Judge Spencer replied, "We have heard good council; and if we live in harmony with what this woman has told us, we shall be sure to be good people here, and reach a final rest in heaven."³⁵

Judge Potter was not about to accede to Jemima, and he brought a suit of ejectment against her. He still held the release papers and was willing to fight for the land which he believed to be rightfully his. The case was tried before Chancellor Kent and, according to the plaintiff's case, Judge Potter was proven to be the owner of the lands for which he held release papers. When Jemima took the stand, she drew a document from her pocket, which proved to be "a most formidable parchment, having appended to it two-hundred seals, with the signatures of all her followers, exemplified by the great seal of the State, certifying that it had been duly recorded in the Secretary of State's Office, long previous to Potter's releases. It bore the same date as the deeds which had been given to her people. It constituted the Friend sole trustee for her followers, and referring to the deeds, modified them thus: "That the interest in the lands, granted by said deeds, should be held no longer than the subscribers lease of said lands, by any member, should operate as a forfeiture of his right; that nothing should pass to the purchaser, by any such sale, but the land should revert to the said Jemima."³⁶ Jemima won the case, and Judge Potter left the courtroom in disgrace with a large bill of cost to pay.

Judge Potter returned to Rhode Island with the intent to reoccupy his old homestead. Instead, he found that public sentiment was still against him. He sold "Old Abbey" in 1807, and returned to the

³³Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 254.

³⁵Stafford C. Cleveland, *History and Directory of Yates County*, I (Penn Yan, N.Y., Cleveland, 1873), p. 71.

³⁶Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

Genesee country where he finally settled.

Jemima sent Abraham Dayton to Canada during the misunderstandings in order to find a new site there for a colony. Governor Simcoe made a grant of land in Beauford Township, but he afterward revoked the grant saying that the society was a new sect, and he did not wish to encourage their immigration into his territory.³⁷ However, the grant was made to Dayton himself, who moved to Canada with his family and he died shortly thereafter.

When her friends all began to leave her, Jemima became a heart-broken woman. She was afflicted with dropsy, but she never consulted a physician. Her seemingly perpetual beauty faded as the disease continually disfigured her. Travelers passed by simply to gape at this goddess about whom they had heard so much. The Friend refused no travelers the hospitality of her home; her door was always open to them. These people ate her food and accepted her generosity, but always their tongues were in cheek as they plagued her with mocking questions.

Notwithstanding the lady had received our letter as soon as she came home, we were suffered to wait in her kitchen three-fourths of an hour without any offer of refreshment, before we were admitted to an audience.

At last her prime minister appeared to conduct us into her presence. Her name is Rachel Mellen; she is from Pennsylvania, and has yielded a considerable fortune to the use of the Friend . . . She rose to meet us, and shook hands with us. As soon as we were seated, I observed that the end of our visit was to gratify our curiosity, and to obtain such information as she could give us as to the peculiarities of her religious tenets and her modes of worship. She took no notice of any implied inquiry . . . When we pressed her too closely her refuge was declamation which continued until our patience was exhausted, and the subject of our inquiry lost. Her claims to a divine commission, which were not openly stated, but closely implied to us, it was particularly difficult to induce her to defend. She appeared somewhat offended when I told her, that I knew of no other test of divine authority but miraculous power; nor would she explain to me how I might detect imposition . . . Her mental powers are vigorous. She has acuteness and cunning and must be skilled in human nature, to have gained such an

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 255.

ascendency over so many minds. I was astonished at the dexterity with which she evaded our questions, and at the same time she endeavored to entrap us.³⁸

Unfortunately, the life of Jemima Wilkinson is erroneously regarded by many as one of wantonness and scandal. Most of the guilt for these beliefs lies with her biographer, Hudson, with the newspapers which carried disparaging articles about all the enthusiasts and, regrettably, much of the blame must be borne by Jemima's own followers who claimed that the Friend was Christ in His second coming. According to provisions in Jemima's will, her papers can never be read; consequently, many doubts about her character will never be cleared, but there is no reason to discredit her in any way. As Robert P. St. John so aptly phrased: "Those who consider all the evidence judicially will conclude that the real Jemima Wilkinson was the product of the romantic and credulous times in which she lived and was a religious enthusiast, or zealot, or fanatic, but not an adventuress or charlatan."

Jemima Wilkinson must be given a great deal of credit for helping to open the gates of the Old Northwest. She had no fears of the imminent dangers of that wild country: Providence was her protector. Her apostles had planted their first crops when the great road from Philadelphia to Fort Tioga was declared passable in 1788.

"The Friend hath need of these things" is a false statement by a misinformed biographer. Carefully kept journals show that every gift received by the Friend was repaid. Jemima Wilkinson's will provided that all her worldly goods be bequeathed in trust to Rachel and Margaret Malin, and that the poor members of the Society be provided with whatever they needed as long as they shall remain faithful. In her will it was written: "Be it remembered, That in order to remove all doubts of the due execution of the foregoing Will and Testament, being the person who before the year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-seven, was known and called by the name of Jemima Wilkinson, but since that time as the Universal Friend, do make public and declare, the within instrument, as my last Will and Testament, as witness my hand and seal this seventeenth day of the seventh month July in the year one thousand eight hundred and eighteen." Jemima never admitted that she had not died in 1776, and she never wrote her name but signed with a cross.

³⁸*The Christian Disciple*, V (Boston, June 1817), p. 277.

Even on her deathbed, the Universal Friend received friends and followers, and their faith was enlightened by her own demonstration of courage and faith.

"My friends I must soon depart," she said on July 1, 1819, "I am going — this night I leave you."

That night an entry was made in the *Death Book of the Society of Universal Friends*: "25 minutes past two on the clock, the Friend went from here."³⁹

³⁹Wisbey, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

PARTY CHAOS EMBROILS RHODE ISLAND

by PHILIP A. GRANT, JR., PH.D.

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[concluded from October, 1967, p. 125]

THE GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION of 1834 was held in April, a month in which the Bank controversy had probably reached its zenith. It was a popular election, conducted on a statewide level, and in every sense a reasonably accurate gauge of statewide sentiment. The Whigs were determined to unseat John Brown Francis, the incumbent Democratic governor, and it was expected that they would put forward their strongest possible candidate in order to regain control of the State House.

The Whigs nominated Senator Nehemiah Knight for governor. Senator Knight was a thirty-two-year veteran of political combat, an ardent foe of Jacksonian Democracy, and perhaps the most renowned public figure in Rhode Island at that time. Having served as a member of the Rhode Island House in 1802, Knight later occupied the positions of clerk of the Court of Common Pleas, clerk of the Circuit Court, and Collector of Customs. In 1817 he had been elected governor, and, after four years of service in that office, had been promoted to the United States Senate, having accumulated fourteen years of seniority by 1834.⁴⁴ In nominating Knight, the Whigs endorsed a very formidable candidate.

⁴⁴*Biographical Directory of the American Congress*, p. 1422.

Governor Francis was considerably younger than Senator Knight and was handicapped both by his Philadelphia birth and by his relatively brief nine years of political experience. Francis had spent four years in the Rhode Island House and two years in the State Senate. The National Republicans had chosen him for governor in 1831, and, although he declined this nomination, he had received such a hearty endorsement by the National Republican press that, when brought forward for governor by the Democrats and Antimasons in 1833, the newspapers found it difficult to attack him.⁴⁵ Although Francis had emerged victorious by over seven hundred votes in 1833, there was reason to believe that he would be unable to prevent Senator Knight from eradicating this margin.

The 1834 election was extremely close, but Governor Francis ultimately prevailed over Senator Knight by a vote of 3,676 to 3,520.⁴⁶ An examination of the election statistics revealed that Governor Francis did not fare very well in the localities which had memorialized Congress in opposition to the President's bank policies. This was especially true in the two most prominent communities, Newport and Providence. Senator Knight carried Newport by the decisive margin of 285 to 151, while he topped Francis in Providence by the whopping margin of 911 to 242.⁴⁷ Excluding these two communities, Francis had a majority of nearly a thousand votes. His greatest electoral strength was concentrated in rural Washington County⁴⁸ and in his home town, Warwick. Although he was decisively defeated in several of the commercial centers, his majorities in many of the smaller towns were sufficient to insure his re-election. The Whigs had put forward their best candidate to oppose the governor, at a time when thousands of Rhode Islanders were enraged at the currency policies of the National Democratic Administration. The defeat of Senator Knight was indeed a crushing one for the Whigs and obviously a gratifying one for the Democrats. In 1833, the Democrats were a minority party and had yet to enjoy the fruits of victory in Rhode Island. Their electoral triumph of that year was achieved in the midst of a period of prosperity. Their 1834 triumph, however,

⁴⁵Irving B. Richman, "John Brown Francis," *DAB*, VI, pp. 579-580.

⁴⁶*Rhode Island Manual, 1957-1958*, p. 203.

⁴⁷*Newport Mercury*, April 18, 1835, p. 2.

⁴⁸Washington County was the only county in Rhode Island which refrained from memorializing Congress on the Bank question.

occurred during a recession, a recession largely attributed to the Democratic Party. In view of this, the victory of Governor Francis must have been reassuring to himself as well as gratifying to his party.

The fact that the people of Rhode Island had awarded a majority to their Democratic governor, and yet had elected a Whig House was another hint that a "rotten-borough" system prevailed in Rhode Island. This same House would memorialize Congress the following month and would participate in the election of a United States senator the ensuing January. Thus, although the electorate had voiced their confidence in a Democratic governor, they had elected a House which could exhibit its hostility to the Jackson Administration and would more than likely guarantee the election of a Whig to represent Rhode Island in the Upper House of the Twenty-fourth Congress.

The two houses of the Rhode Island legislature convened in January 1835 for the purpose of electing a successor to Senator Knight. Having decided to retire from the Senate, Knight was widely suspected to be a candidate for the governorship in 1835. As in 1833, the Democrats and Antimasons failed to unite in behalf of a common candidate. The Whig nominee was Albert C. Greene, while the Democrats again selected Elisha R. Potter, and the Antimasons chose William Sprague, Jr.⁴⁹ The Whigs easily had a plurality of the legislature, but not a majority. On the first ballot in the morning of January 21, the votes were as follows: Greene 39; Potter 30; Sprague 11; Congressman Burges 1; Senator Knight 1. Unfortunately, Greene reached his peak on the eleventh ballot, at which point the count ran: Greene 41; Potter 29; Sprague 11; Knight 1.⁵⁰ Two concluding ballots were conducted on the afternoon of the following day. On both ballots the votes remained substantially the same, and finally the two houses realized the futility of further ballots and dissolved.⁵¹ Even had the Democrats and Antimasons agreed on a mutual candidate, the vote would undoubtedly have ended in a 41-41 tie. The ultimate decision was postponed until the May session of the legislature, thus making it more important than ever for the Whigs and Democrats to strive for success in the forthcoming April elections.

⁴⁹Carroll, *op. cit.*, p. 567.

⁵⁰*Newport Mercury*, January 24, 1835, p. 2.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

The Democrats renominated Governor Francis in 1835, while the Whigs once more selected Senator Knight as their candidate.⁵² Although the candidates were the same as in 1834, the Bank question was rapidly evaporating, and in no degree did it dominate the campaign. As in the previous year, the result was amazingly close, but Governor Francis outpolled Senator Knight 3,888 to 3,774.⁵³ Knight did exceptionally well in the strategic communities of Newport and Providence, winning 328 to 150 in the former town and 888 to 285 in the latter.⁵⁴ The remainder of the state was won handily by Francis, and in nearly every respect the verdict of 1835 was a replica of that of the preceding year.

The contest for control of the Rhode Island House, like the corresponding one for the governorship, was very close. The final results disclosed that the Whigs would have thirty-seven members in that body, while the Democrats would have thirty-five.⁵⁵

In the State Senate the Whigs won four seats, the Democrats captured two seats, and there was no choice for the remaining four seats, due to the absence of majorities. Three of the four victorious Whigs had majorities less than twenty-seven votes, while the two successful Democrats each had majorities lower than twelve votes. A shift of twenty-five votes in four districts would have given the Democrats control of the State Senate, while a shift of one hundred and sixty-three votes in three additional districts would have guaranteed the Democrats nine of a possible ten seats.⁵⁶ The extremely close contest for governor would certainly be of considerable importance for the state, but the even closer vote for the House and Senate would be a determining factor in the election of a United States senator, an election which inevitably would have national effects.

⁵²*Bristol Gazette and Family Companion* (Bristol, April 11, 1835), p. 2.

⁵³*Rhode Island Manual*, 1957-1958, p. 203.

⁵⁴*Newport Mercury*, April 18, 1835, p. 2.

⁵⁵*Providence Daily Journal* (Providence, April 18, 1835), p. 2.

⁵⁶The vote in these districts was as follows:

First	Whipple, W.	3821	Billings, D.	3818	Others	7
Third	King, W.	3846	Weatherhead, D.	3815	Others	5
Fourth	Weeden, W.	3833	Noyes, D.	3814	Others	2
Fifth	Low, W.	3724	Spencer, D.	3817	Others	96
Seventh	Sterne, W.	3831	Wilkinson, D.	3821	Others	3
Ninth	Brown, W.	3808	Spink, D.	3735	Others	108
Tenth	Eddy, W.	3824	Potter, D.	3746	Others	85

As Senator Knight had been unsuccessful in his quests for the governorship, he decided to attempt securing re-election to the Senate, and was promptly accepted as the nominee by his fellow Whigs. The Democrats again chose Elisha R. Potter, and the few remaining Antimasons concurred with this choice. When the legislature convened in May, Knight was re-elected to the Senate by the narrow margin of 41 to 38.⁵⁷ Had the Democrats won two additional seats in either the House or Senate, they would have had a majority and thus could have elected one of their own partisans to the Senate. For the second time in two years, the Whigs had managed to elect one of their brethren to the Senate by an extremely narrow margin. More than ever before, the Democrats must have realized the necessity of controlling the state legislature.

Immediately after the election of a United States senator, the Whigs and Democrats plunged into serious preparations for the congressional election of August 1835. The two Rhode Island congressional seats were divided between Dutee Pearce, a staunch Jacksonian supporter, and Tristram Burges, an equally fervent Jacksonian adversary. It was apparent that both the Whigs and Democrats would make determined bids to elect two of their party members to represent Rhode Island in the Twenty-fourth Congress.

The Whigs scheduled their congressional convention on June 24 at Newport. A committee of three from each county, appointed to decide the congressional nominations, selected Congressman Burges and Henry Y. Cranston as the two candidates. The convention unanimously endorsed Burges and Cranston and subsequently passed two resolutions, neither of which pertained to the congressional election. The first resolution cited the expediency of recommending a presidential candidate to the people of Rhode Island for 1836, and stressed the choice of "a man who merits and enjoys the unqualified confidence of the friends of the Constitution, of the Union, and of the freedom, safety and welfare of the Republic, throughout our common country." The second resolution maintained that Daniel Webster fulfilled these prescribed qualifications, and accordingly nominated Webster for President of the United States.⁵⁸

⁵⁷*Providence Daily Journal*, May 14, 1835, p. 2.

⁵⁸*Newport Mercury*, June 27, 1835, p. 2.

On the following day the Democrats assembled for their congressional convention, also at Newport. The Democrats unanimously nominated Congressman Pearce for re-election, and endorsed William Sprague, Jr., as his running mate. Like the Whigs on the previous day, the Democrats passed no resolutions on the approaching contest, except a promise to work honorably for the election of their two nominees. They did, however, approve the nominations of Martin Van Buren for President and Richard M. Johnson for Vice-President in the forthcoming national elections, and consequently ratified the decision of their fellow Democrats at the recent Baltimore Convention.⁵⁹

The most extensive party platform of 1835 in Rhode Island was adopted at the Antimasonic congressional convention on July 17 at Providence. The first resolution attacked the Masonic Order for falsely pretending to dissolve itself and for openly defying the laws of the state by not filing annual returns to the secretary of state of their numbers and officers. The Antimasons were also infuriated by the Whig nomination of Henry Y. Cranston to Congress, inasmuch as Cranston was allegedly a Royal Arch Mason. The convention in its next resolution advised all Antimasons in Rhode Island to continue in "a steady and unwavering perseverance in the great cause in which they have engaged." The Antimasons in their third resolution concurred in the Democratic nominations of Pearce and Sprague for Congress.⁶⁰

The Whigs had nominated two noteworthy candidates in Burges and Cranston. Burges had successively served as a member of the Rhode Island House, chief justice of the State Supreme Court, and professor of oratory at Brown University. First elected to Congress in 1825, he had been returned to the House four times.⁶¹ Cranston, while nearly twenty years younger than Burges and not nearly as experienced in political affairs as the latter, had nevertheless served fifteen years in the Rhode Island House.⁶² A few weeks prior to his nomination to Congress, Cranston had added to his stature by being

⁵⁹*Republican Herald*, June 27, 1835, p. 2.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, July 22, 1835, p. 2.

⁶¹Burges's political career is covered at length in Henry L. Bowen, *Memoir of Tristram Burges, with selections from his speeches and occasional writings* (Providence, Marshall, Brown and Company, 1835), pp. 39-184.

⁶²*The Political Register*, p. 349.

elected speaker of the House.⁶³

The Democrats had made a wise decision in nominating Congressman Pearce for re-election. Not only had Pearce been eminently successful in his previous quests for public office,⁶⁴ but also he had emerged as one of President Jackson's most faithful adherents in Congress. In William Sprague, Jr., the Democrats had a youthful and vigorous political figure. A former Antimason, Sprague had served four years as speaker of the Rhode Island House,⁶⁵ before suffering defeat by Cranston, his current congressional opponent.

There were two factors advantageous to the Democrats in this congressional election. First of all, the two congressional aspirants were to be elected at-large throughout the state. Congressman Pearce had at one time complained of the "rotten-borough" system in Rhode Island, but in this contest his chances of victory would not be hindered in the least by the system which he justifiably deplored. This was to be a popular election on a statewide basis, and the Democrats could take solace in the fact that they had elected a governor three times in succession in similar statewide contests.

The second factor favoring the Democrats was their alliance with the Antimasonic Party. The Democrats and Antimasons had generally been unable to agree on a common slate for the state legislature, and hence the Whigs usually had been able to win control of that body, and by doing so elect their own choice to the United States Senate. The Democrats and Antimasons had endorsed a common candidate for the governorship on three consecutive occasions, and on each of these occasions the Whigs had been subdued. The Democrats, moreover, would undoubtedly profit by the presence of a Mason on the Whig congressional ticket. Judging from the past effectiveness of the Democratic Antimasonic coalition, it seemed that the Whigs would probably find it impossible to capture both congressional seats in Rhode Island and might very well lose the one seat they possessed.

The election took place in the final week of August, and the verdict was incredibly close. The four congressional aspirants were separated

⁶³Cranston had received thirty-seven votes, William Sprague thirty-four, and one member had been absent.

⁶⁴In 1833 Pearce had been re-elected by the impressive majority of four hundred and fifty-six votes. This Congressional contest had been non-partisan. *Newport Mercury*, November 30, 1833, p. 2.

⁶⁵*Biographical Directory of the American Congress*, p. 1850.

by a mere two hundred and seventy-five votes. The two Democrats, however, each had secured the necessary majorities for victory. The results were as follows:⁶⁶

Sprague, Democrat	3,924
Pearce, Democrat	3,901
Burges, Whig	3,776
Cranston, Whig	3,659

The average of the Democratic ballots amounted to slightly less than 3,913 while the average Whig vote was 3,718. Thus, the average majority of the two Democrats was approximately one hundred and ninety-five votes. This majority was substantially similar to the average majority of one hundred and thirty-five votes polled by Governor Francis in the two preceding state elections. Not only were statewide contests close in Rhode Island, but also the margins of victory were virtually identical.

Of considerable surprise was the fact that William Sprague, Jr., topped the ticket in his initial bid for a congressional seat. There can be little doubt that Sprague's Antimasonic affiliation was a potent factor in his electoral triumph. On the other hand, it might be deduced that Cranston's relatively poor showing was in part due to his Masonic allegiance. Only twenty-three votes separated the two Democratic candidates, an indication of amazing Democratic unity. The one hundred and seventeen votes separating Burges and Cranston might lead one to suspect that the Whigs were not functioning in complete unity and that perhaps more than a few Whigs had refused to support a Masonic nominee. In any event, it seemed certain that the Democrats would not have won both congressional seats without the assistance of the Antimasons.⁶⁷

Prior to 1833, the Democrats had encountered failure in their attempts to capture the Rhode Island governorship. Due to their political marriage with the Antimasons in that year, the Democrats had ousted the Whigs from the State House. The two succeeding gubernatorial contests had also resulted in Whig defeats with the Antimasons abetting the Democratic endeavors in both instances.

⁶⁶*Rhode Island Acts, Resolves and Reports*, October 1835, p. 4.

⁶⁷The Democrats also gained four seats in the Rhode Island House in the August elections, enabling them to assume control of that body by a 39-33 ratio. *Newport Mercury*, August 29, 1835, p. 2.

Finally, the Democrats had obtained Rhode Island's two congressional seats in the election of August, 1835. Again the Antimasons had volunteered their co-operation and to a large extent had been the determining element in the Democratic triumph. To ignore or to underestimate the Antimasonic contribution to the Democratic cause in the years 1833, 1834 and 1835 would be most unrealistic. Had the Antimasons remained neutral in these three gubernatorial elections and the 1835 congressional contest, the prospects of Democratic victories would have been quite remote, if not inconceivable.

In both 1833 and 1835 the Whigs in the Rhode Island legislature had managed to elect one of their associates to the United States Senate. Yet, on both occasions, they did so only after prolonged wrangling and continued deadlocks in the legislature, even though they were the beneficiaries of a "rotten-borough" apportionment and a divided opposition. The validity of the election of Senator Robbins in 1833 was nullified by the succeeding legislature, and there was good reason to believe that Congress had not acted correctly in seating Robbins. In 1835 the Whigs had failed to elect their candidate to the Senate in the January session of the legislature. Finally, however, they succeeded in re-electing Senator Knight in the May session. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that Knight had been re-elected by an extremely narrow majority and also that he had been rejected by the people of Rhode Island in the popular elections of 1834 and 1835. The same legislature which pretended to represent the people approved the candidacy of a man who had been repudiated by the people on two occasions within twelve months. Although the Whigs of Rhode Island could point to two of their partisans representing them in the United States Senate, they could take little pride in either the manner by which these two men had been elected or by the magnitude of their respective elections.

The Democrats, although not the recipients of overwhelming victories, could derive satisfaction from the fact that they were winning popular elections in Rhode Island. Rhode Island had long been a stronghold of Federalism and during the first five years of Jackson's Presidency had been under Whig domination. Jackson himself had never carried Rhode Island, but had progressively increased his electoral percentage in each succeeding presidential contest there. By 1835 the President must have been delighted to learn that Rhode

Island was slowly but indisputably becoming a Democratic state, a state which in 1836 would present a majority of its votes to Martin Van Buren, the Democratic aspirant for the Presidency.

NOTES FROM THE SHELVES

Selected by NOEL P. CONLON

When my father, Arnold Buffum, was a child, it was not uncommon for fugitive slaves from New York to seek refuge in Rhode Island; although the United States Constitution guaranteed to the slaveholder the right to recapture them in any part of the country. On one occasion, a whole family who had escaped, and been for some months in hiding, came to my grandfather's house. They were established in a farm house near the homestead, and employment was furnished to the father and the older children. In a short time, their place of refuge was discovered and one day, the slave-master from New York, accompanied by an officer, came riding up from Providence to arrest them. The neighbors were hastily summoned, and with the household of my grandfather, formed a human barricade, opposed to their entrance through the gates. A smart young colored laborer, who had become attached to one of the fugitive's daughters, brandished a knife before the slave catchers and threatened to "pudding" them, if they did not depart; and the calm determination, with, perhaps, some wiser threats of the assembled and constantly increasing company of defenders, succeeded in driving them away without their prey; and the family remained without further molestation.

Elizabeth Buffum Chace, *Anti-Slavery Reminiscences* (Central Falls, Freeman, 1891).

A curious story is told of the way in which Wickford, Rhode Island, got its parish church where it wanted to have it. This "oldest Episcopal church still standing in the northern part of the United States" was

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NOTES FROM THE SHELVES (*Continued*)

erected in 1707 at the top of what was then called McSparran Hill, and was long known as the Narragansett Church. In the course of seventy-five years, the population changed so much, however, that most of the worshippers who came to the church had to travel from Wickford, seven miles away. Yet the McSparran faction was not willing that the church should be removed to the more convenient site. Then the Wickfordians resolved on a *coup d'état*. The road, from the place where the church stood to Wickford, was all down hill. Mustering their forces, one evening (in 1800), and pressing into the service all the oxen in the neighborhood, the Wickford contingent placed the edifice on wheels and, while their opponents soundly slept, hauled it to the spot at the foot of the hill which seemed to them the most convenient place for it. As there was no getting the building up the hill again, the McSparran folk had no vent for the wrath that possessed them. For, of course, they could not use unchurchly language.

Mary Caroline Crawford, *Social Life in Old New England* (Boston, Little, Brown, 1914).

Another interesting account of a journey in New England is that of Robert Gilmore, a young gentleman of Baltimore, who, in 1797, — being then twenty-three, — came north to travel and to make sketches of places which appealed to him as worthy of preservation in the pages of his diary. . . . “Having hired a stage to take us on to Providence, five of us set off early next morning, and got to Providence to dinner; after which we walked over the Town and along the wharves, by which lay many vessels. Tho’ this place & Newport are small, there are some of the richest & most extensive merchants in the United States residing in them, particularly Providence. Here lives Mr. John Brown, a man who has ships in all quarters of the globe, who lives like a prince, and contributes to the support of a number of industrious citizens. There are a number of elegant houses in Providence, chiefly built of wood and painted in a neat, handsome manner.”

Mary Caroline Crawford, *Social Life in Old New England* (Boston, Little, Brown, 1914).