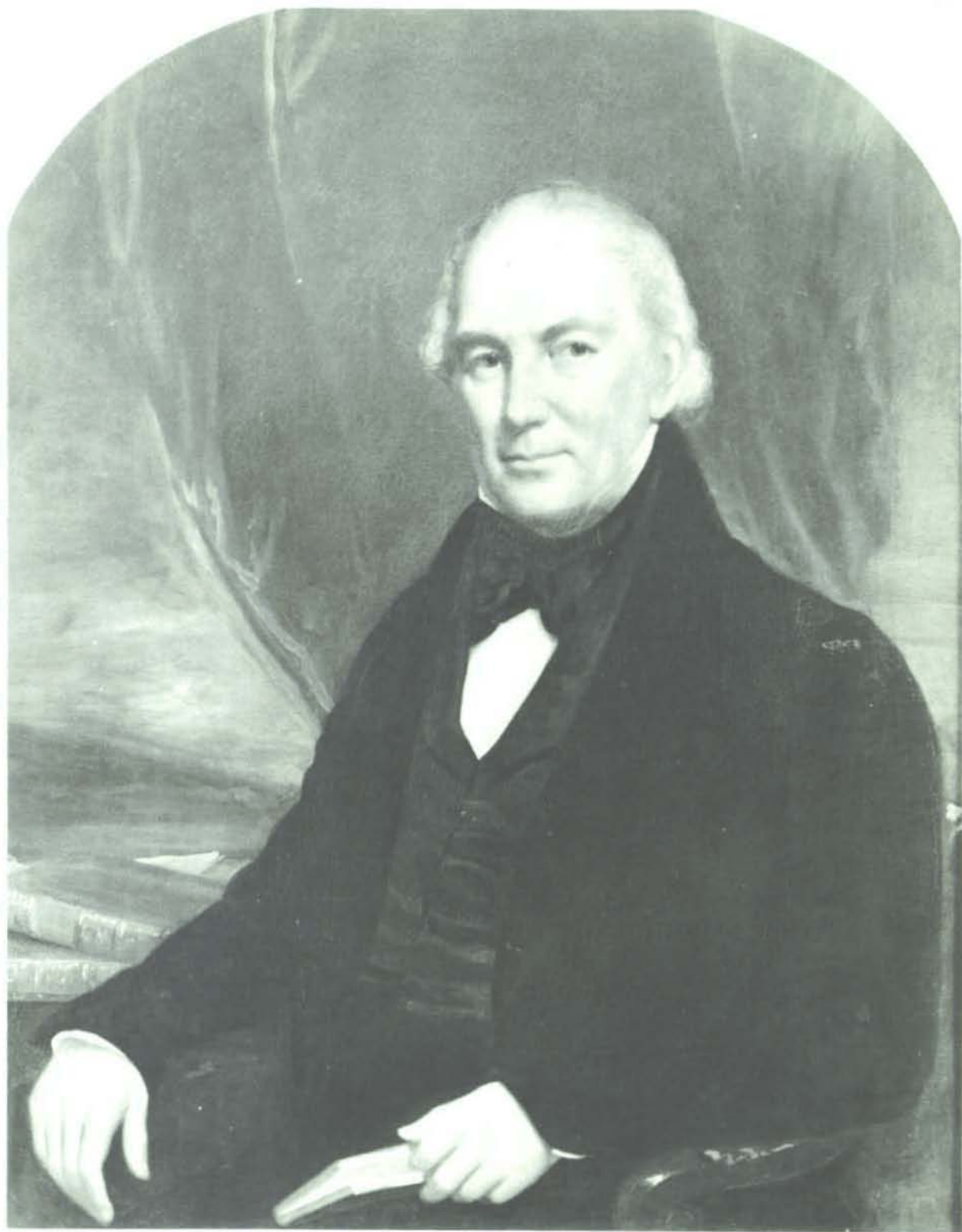


R H O D E  
I S L A N D  
H I S T O R Y

WINTER 1972



*Portrait by Samuel Lovett Waldo and William Jewett.*

*Courtesy Brown University Archives.*

*"Every thing . . . in our country . . . is marching on with steam-boat and railroad speed upon the highway of improvement . . ." In this metaphor of his inauguration*

*speech, June 4, 1832, Samuel W. Bridgham, first mayor of Providence, paid tribute to the transportation revolution, a factor in making a city of the town of Providence (p. 29).*

# R H O D E I S L A N D H I S T O R Y

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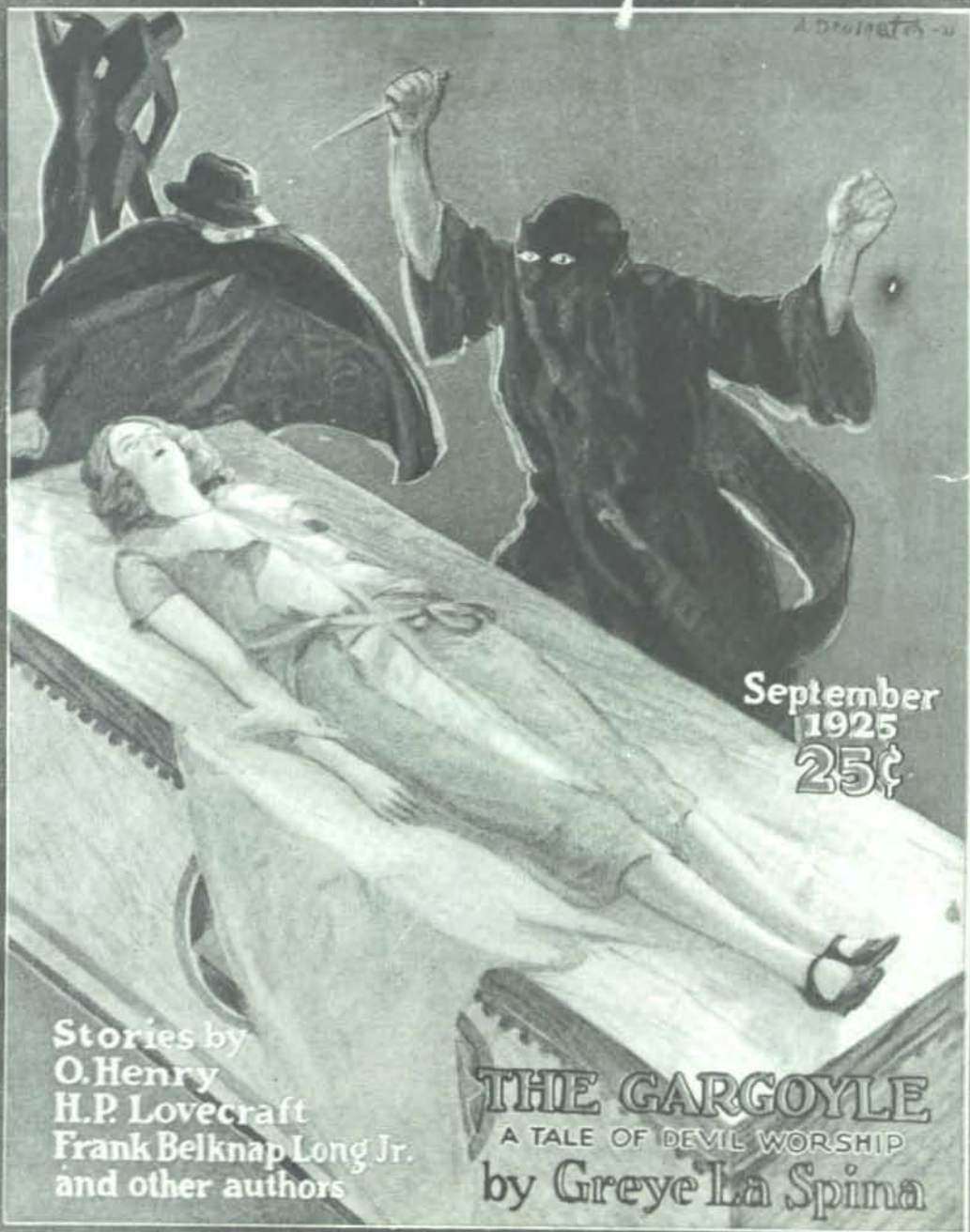
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VOLUME 31, NUMBER 1 FEBRUARY 1972

# Weird Tales

*The Unique Magazine*



September  
1925  
25¢

Stories by  
O. Henry  
H.P. Lovecraft  
Frank Belknap Long Jr.  
and other authors

**THE GARGOYLE**  
A TALE OF DEVIL WORSHIP  
by Greye La Spina



## Facts in the Case of H. P. Lovecraft

by Barton L. St. Armand\*

A rather unusual assortment of readers may have been stirred by a minor item in *The New York Times Book Review*, May 17, 1970. Included under the heading of "Revivals" in the "European Notebook" of Mark Slonim, it announced to its American audience that

*A most striking phenomenon in France, Italy, and Spain is the number of translations (mostly very good) of the American science-fiction writer H. P. Lovecraft. Not only are they widely read in Paris, Rome, and Madrid, but Lovecraft is also hailed by the leading critics as superior to Poe. The Spanish essayist José Luis Garcia recently included Lovecraft in a list of 10 best writers of the world, and the French sophisticated periodical L'Herne dedicated a special large issue to the greatest American master of supernatural literature.*

While most readers probably turned the page in continued puzzlement and uninterest, never having heard of H. P. Lovecraft in the first place, and at any rate doubting such effusive foreign "discoveries" as inherently suspect, that "unusual assortment" I have mentioned would have found this brief notice exciting news, a tremendously meaningful "straw in the wind." This saving remnant might be broken down further into three general groups composed of, first, a number of sophisticated and well-established creative writers and critics; second, a naive and even slightly fanatical cadre of science-fiction collectors and "fans," mostly high school or college students; and, third, those deeply interested in Rhode Island history, especially its traditional genealogical, political, and literary dimensions.

To answer "Who was H. P. Lovecraft?" is a great deal more easy than to explain exactly why he should receive such belated and enthusiastic recognition in Europe, or how the three groups cluster together in common response to his growing critical reputation.

So I shall first attempt to answer for those who still lie beyond the pale of dedicated "lovecraftimania"—to coin a word matching in its significant absurdity the heading "Lovecraftiana," which is used to describe not only the materials deposited in the John Hay Library of Brown University but also those startlingly expensive items stamped by his hand which are now to be found in several rare book catalogs. Yet the biography only reveals that this "greatest American master of supernatural fiction" led an intellectually fascinating and factually boring life.

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was born on August 20, 1890, at his grandfather's big Angell Street house in Providence. In this house Howard grew up, surrounded by adoring adults, after his father was confined to Butler Hospital and died of syphilis when his son was only eight. Although Lovecraft was something of a child prodigy—writing stories and poetry and conducting scientific experiments long before this tragic event—his over-protective mother discouraged him from seeking companionship with children his own age and continually told him that he had a "repulsive" and "hideous" face. Young Howard proceeded to build his own dream-world, peopling it with mythological creatures and beings from the past, while to outside appearances he cultivated the pose of the eighteenth-century skeptic, a bored spectator who found human life and the universe dull, mechanical, and ultimately meaningless. Writing later about his skeptical view of man and his world, which seemed almost to be inborn, Lovecraft said:

*My first positive utterance of a skeptical nature probably appeared before my fifth birthday, when I was told what I really knew before, that "Santa Claus" is a myth. This admission caused me to ask why "God" is*

\*Assistant Professor of English and American Civilization at Brown, Mr. St. Armand first presented this paper as a lecture before The Rhode Island Historical Society in November 1969.

*Such pulp periodicals as *Weird Tales* and *Amazing Stories*, the only kind of publications that printed Lovecraft's professional writing during his lifetime, are now sought-after first editions of his works.*

not equally a myth. Not long afterwards I was placed in the "infant class" at the Sunday School of the venerable First Baptist Church . . . and there resigned all vestiges of Christian belief. The absurdity of the myths I was called on to accept, and the sombre greyness of the whole faith as compared to the Eastern magnificence of Mohamitanism, made me definitely an agnostic, and caused me to become so pestiferous a questioner that I was permitted to discontinue attendance . . . No doubt I was regarded as a corrupter of the simple faith of the other "infants."<sup>1</sup>

Certainly it seems that any "infantile" behavior which Lovecraft may ever have exhibited in his youth was more that of the *enfant terrible* variety. What little was left of the family fortune disappeared with the passing of Lovecraft's grandfather, Whipple Phillips, in 1904, and Lovecraft and his mother were forced to move to less respectable lodgings. Howard tried attending Hope High School but suffered a nervous collapse, while his mother entered a slow "decline" which terminated in her own confinement to Butler in 1919 and her subsequent death in 1921. Thereafter Lovecraft lived with two remaining aunts and managed to widen his interests by participating in the Amateur Press movement, an association of young writers who exchanged their work in the form of privately printed newspapers. Through this outlet for his creative energies he met Sonia Greene — a beautiful widow seven years his senior — and married her in 1924, hoping to make a new start in life. Yet their honeymoon was spent typing the manuscript of a weird story, the first typescript of which Howard had left in the Providence train station. Bad luck dogged him throughout his so-called "New York Exile" as financial matters went from bad to worse.

Finally hinting that the uncongenial "Babylon" of Brooklyn would force him to either madness or suicide, Lovecraft departed for Providence in 1926, suggesting to his wife that they carry on their marriage by correspondence. Again installing himself with his

Howard Phillips Lovecraft, young skeptic.



Courtesy Brown University Library.

aunts, Howard settled down to a life of shabby-genteel contentment, subsisting on what little money he could make by ghost-writing for others and selling his own horror stories to pulp periodicals such as *Weird Tales*. He also continued to cultivate his pose as an eighteenth-century English gentleman, an upholder of Nordic superiority, and a bemused spectator of the world's foibles and follies. Adding young aspiring authors to the circle of literary friends he had made in

<sup>1</sup> "Confession of Unfaith," *The Liberal* 1:2 (February 1922), reprinted in *Lovecraft Collector's Library*, ed. George Wetzel, 1 (1952).



New York, he kept up this routine of desultory reading and writing until his death on March 15, 1937. All of Lovecraft's residences, save for his grandfather's house at 454 Angell Street, are still standing, and include a flat at 598 Angell and an apartment at 10 Barnes Street (where his ghost was recently seen by a student resident). His last home, an eighteenth-century eyrie, has been moved to 65 Prospect Street, where it looks singularly un sinister, but it stood in his own day at 66 College Street, right in back of the John Hay Library, though the monolithic and slightly skewed Brown University Art Building, which now occupies the site, seems straight out of one of his stories of "Non-Euclidean" and "Cyclopean" architecture, providing a strangely appropriate monument.

In spite of the glaring fact that Lovecraft never published anything save in pulp periodicals of the late 1920s and early 1930s, heyday of *Weird Tales* and *Amazing Stories*, he still remains Providence's only native writer of note besides Sarah Helen Whitman. And on a state level, if we discount Edwin O'Connor and S. J. Perelman, he emerges perhaps as Rhode Island's most distinguished native author of fiction, though following in his own way, as I shall hope to demonstrate, a local color tradition once made famous by the almost forgotten "Shepherd Tom" Hazard of the *Jonny Cake Papers*. Now, however, Lovecraft is being read not only by specialists in local or literary history but also at both top and bottom of literary circles in general. We could set the distinguished American critic, Edmund Wilson, who titled his essay on Lovecraft "Tales of the Marvellous and the Ridiculous,"<sup>2</sup> against Senor Garcia, and his ranking of Lovecraft with Shakespeare and Cervantes, but this again would not solve the problem. Why is Lovecraft being read at all in the 1970s?

This brings us back to two groups of Lovecraft readers. We have not yet considered the "high-brows" and the "low-brows," who evince an interest in his work which is decidedly non-historical in nature. The

*Lovecraft lived here.*



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low-brow contingent used to be composed mostly of teen-aged enthusiasts with an abiding interest in any pulp form from horror-pornography to science fiction.

2 Edmund Wilson, *Classics and Commercialism* (New York, 1950).

Lovecraft's value as a creative artist ...



Courtesy Brown University Library.

These were, like Lovecraft himself, "outsiders" of the crumbling society of the 1930s, who sought in pulp literature an escape from the more frighteningly immediate realities of mid-Depression America.

The escape was accomplished through the generation of a *frisson nouveau*, a visceral chill or thrill created by confrontation with some monstrous evil, whether from outer space or the bite of a werewolf or some other equally esoteric origin. Origins hardly mattered, for as Franklin Roosevelt told the nation, in words which could also stand as a formula for this kind of fiction and this kind of audience, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Yet Lovecraft has survived the demise of

... is similar to that of Edgar Allan Poe.



RIHS Library.

the pulps and is now apparently experiencing some kind of world-wide "revival" in an age of admitted general affluence and relative security. Here, I think, the theory of *frisson nouveau* still holds true.

For Lovecraft's real value as a creative artist is similar to that of the Edgar Allan Poe he so much admired and so often imitated. Lovecraft sets loose the boundaries of the imagination and allows for the exploration of other worlds, which may or may not be specifically "Lovecraftian" worlds. Those young writers who formed what was called the "Lovecraft Cult" after his premature death in 1937 took over the mythos and atmospheric effects which Lovecraft had perfected, but



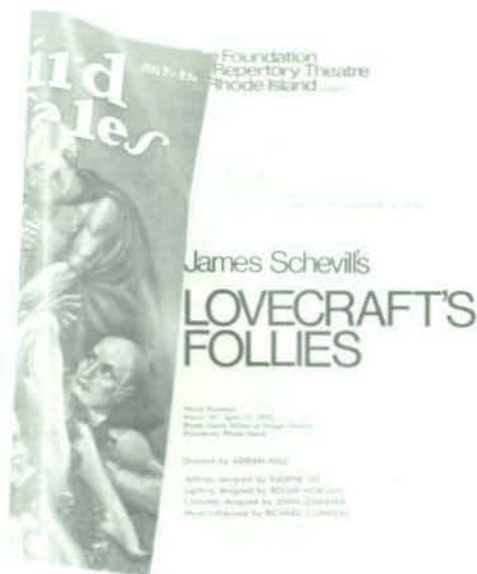
they failed miserably because they seldom went beyond the uncanny dimensions and expansive fantasies which Lovecraft himself had only begun to explore. It is as an opener of doors that Lovecraft remains significant, though he may sometimes open doors of a truly fearsome and morbid nature.

Thus such a distinguished film critic as Vincent Canby can devote an entire review to a movie made from a Lovecraft story and damn the unimaginative film while praising the imaginative Lovecraft, further urging readers to take him and his stories seriously. And thus James Schevill can justify his recent popular stage success, "Lovecraft's Follies," which "takes off," in part, from a number of the master's dreams and visions, by declaring that "Lovecraft was the first anti-hero of modern times, one of the fathers you might say of all the anti's we're experiencing today — from anti-politics to anti-matter," and that "Lovecraft, with his surreal vision of the future and his black visions of nether gods which man continually sets loose on the earth, seemed to me a good kind of guide for this journey," a journey into the ambiguities of modern technocracy and the internal chaos of the modern self.

Canby, Schevill, and Kurt Vonnegut, too, who admits to a liking for Lovecraft as a consummate prose artist and stylistic perfectionist, are all responding to the same thing that the so-called "counter-culture" of the young respond to in Lovecraft. For, in his tales and sketches, Lovecraft not only shadows forth the diminished nature of twentieth-century man in an immense and alien universe, but he also restores something which has been lost to the spiritual nature of that confused being. As the great Swiss psychologist and philosopher C. G. Jung writes of this modern consciousness:

*As scientific understanding has grown, so our world has become dehumanized. Man feels himself isolated in the cosmos, because he is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional unconscious identity with natural phenomena. These have slowly lost their symbolic implications. Thunder is no longer the voice*

*Weird Tales cover is adopted for the program of Schevill's stage success.*



*Courtesy Trinity Square Repertory Company.*

*of an angry god, nor is lightning his avenging missile. No river contains a spirit, no tree is the life principle of a man, no snake is the embodiment of wisdom, no mountain cave the home of a great demon. No voices now speak to man from stones, plants, and animals, nor does he speak to them believing they can hear. His contact with nature has gone, and with it has gone the profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied.<sup>3</sup>*

Although H. P. Lovecraft's view of an intimate contact with nature is a dark one, still in his own way he does restore much of that "profound emotional energy" which Jung describes as being lost in our modern world. Lovecraft re-creates that dialogue of cosmic voices, as the characters in his stories are seized, in spite of themselves and their innate scientific skepticism, by forces which compel horrified obedience and primitive response. His appeal and his concern are

<sup>3</sup> C. G. Jung, "Approaching the Unconscious," *Man and His Symbols* (New York, 1964) 95.

with primal roots of human feeling — fear, disgust, wonder, awe — and with an epic backdrop of the fantastic and the dreadful which we find in ancient folk-chronicles such as *Beowulf*, which become in turn the source for a popular modern myth-cycle as mannered as that of Lovecraft, namely J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

As the modern world and modern literature moved more and more into the ego, the completely solipsistic world of stream-of-consciousness, Lovecraft and others like him moved further and further away from that world into the dark, immense, and unknown regions which exist beyond, behind, or below that ego. And when Lovecraft explored consciousness itself, he did not stop at the delineation of merely personal motives and sensations; he went far beneath them into the archetypes and the images which had helped to shape, as well as to define, their substance. His two great themes both involve the Triumph of the Shadow. In one class of his stories, this triumph is the dominance of Jung's interior "shadow" of the collective unconscious, coming from deep inside the human self to overwhelm its conscious, "civilized," or "daylight" realm in a dark eclipse of atavism and violent instinct (as in the famous short tale, "The Rats in the Walls"). Other stories, which tend more toward science fiction than to psychological thrillers, detail the incursion of forces outside and beyond the self, raising the plight of the individual to a cosmic level, and subsequently questioning both man's place in the universe and his conception of his own destiny (as in the significant novella, "The Shadow Out of Time"). Even these approaches, however, can be referred back to the tradition of the so-called "Gothic Novel," of which Lovecraft was so consciously a part, and especially one of its main spokesmen, Mrs. Ann Radcliffe, who

differentiated between the terms "terror" and "horror" by demonstrating that while terror "expanded" the soul to intimations of the sublime (Lovecraft's science-fiction), horror "contracted the soul to a freezing-point of near-annihilation (Lovecraft's psychological chillers).<sup>4</sup> At a time when such words as "outer-space" and "soul" have become current and when there is paradoxically a growing interest in witchcraft, ritual, magic, the demonic, and all forms of the occult, a "Lovecraft revival" should not be a totally unexpected phenomenon.

Now I should like to return to that neglected third group — those interested in the use of Rhode Island history and in the uses of history in general — and consider Lovecraft as a serious writer possessed of a remarkable talent. Specifically, this talent has to do with the transmutation of those native materials he used so extensively and intensively in fiction. In particular, I shall concentrate on Lovecraft's short novel *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (1927-28) because both Lovecraft and the novel's locale have been attacked recently as having a mutually deleterious effect one on the other, and that is an impression I should like to correct.

One of those twentieth-century critics to take Lovecraft seriously is Colin Wilson, a young English philosopher and creative writer who, in the introduction to his own Lovecraftian novel, *The Mind Parasites*, writes of how he first discovered him. The discovery was made in a lonely English cottage — a setting appropriate for reading of weird tales and the onslaught of Gothic horrors — just as many American servicemen first discovered both the power and relevance of Lovecraft and Poe in cheap paperback editions issued by the armed forces. Understandably, Gothic horror and flapping evils are more real on a lonely English

4 Lovecraft defended his "cosmic interest" and taste for the sublime in the following terms, which once again smack of the eighteenth century and Burke's essays "On Taste" and *On the Sublime and the Beautiful*, just as Lovecraft's idea of the imagination was much closer to pre-Romantic or proto-Romantic conception of "fancy" than to Coleridge's transcendental idea of imagination as "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM." Lovecraft writes:

*I could not write about "ordinary people" because I am not the least interested in them. Without interest there can be no art. Man's relations to man do not captivate my fancy. It is man's relation to the cosmos — to the unknown — which alone arouses in me the spark of creative imagination. The humanocentric pose is impossible to me, for I cannot acquire the primitive*

*myopia which magnifies the earth and ignores the background. Pleasure to me is wonder — the unexplored, the unexpected, the thing that is hidden and the changeless thing that lurks behind superficial mutability. To trace the remote in the immediate; the eternal in the ephemeral; the past in the present; the infinite in the finite; these are to me the springs of delight and beauty. Like the late Mr. Wilde, "I live in terror of not being misunderstood."*

"Defense Remains Open," *In Defense of Dagon*, part of Lovecraft's correspondence with "Transatlantic Circulator," an informal group of epistolary critics; April 1921; MS., John Hay Library, Brown University.

5 Colin Wilson, "Preface" to *Mind Parasites* (New York, 1968) 2-3.



moor or in a foxhole in *No Man's Land*, but it is the follow-up to Wilson's discovery which becomes even more interesting when seen in retrospect:

*My book [The Strength to Dream], containing a chapter on Lovecraft, appeared in England in 1961, and I thought I had done with Lovecraft. But later that year, I found myself in Providence, lecturing at Brown University. There I met the Blake scholar, Foster Damon, who looks and sounds like Mark Twain, and he showed me the house where Poe had lived and told me of legends that still survived. But here, in this town of clapboard houses, with its streets ankle-deep in leaves, my imagination was haunted by another writer — Lovecraft. I found that his stories now returned to mind a dozen times a day. I went and looked at the house in which Lovecraft had lived; I spent hours in the university library reading Lovecraft's letters in manuscript, and a thesis that somebody had written on his life and work. Here I read for the first time The Case of Charles Dexter Ward and The Shadow Over Innsmouth. And I had to admit that there was something about Lovecraft that makes him very hard to dismiss. In many ways, I found him more impressive*

*than Poe. Poe's imagination was simply obsessed by death. In some ways, his most typical story is The Premature Burial, which is the kind of nightmare that might occur to any of us. Basically, Poe is a gentle romantic, a lover of beautiful, pale women and ancient Gothic mansions set among wooded hills. Lovecraft is not so concerned with death as with terror. Poe is pre-Dracula; Lovecraft is very much post-Dracula. Poe's world is the world we all live in, seen through eyes that were always aware of "the skull beneath the skin." Lovecraft's world is a creation of his own, as unique and nightmarish as the world of Hieronymus Bosch or Fuseli.<sup>5</sup>*

I would not agree with Wilson's estimate of Poe — whose poem "The Conqueror Worm," for example, far from proves that he is merely a "gentle romantic" — but even more would I quarrel with his reconstitution of Lovecraft which continues throughout the same essay. For Wilson's unpardonable sin, as I see it, is to separate Lovecraft from that very Providence atmosphere which indeed brought the author and his works back so strongly into Wilson's mind. Thus in the same piece we find Wilson saying that Lovecraft's main

... in this town of clapboard houses.

Photograph. Historic American Buildings Survey.





problem was that "He was born into a dreary provincial city — attractive enough in its own way, but as painfully narrow and dull as the Norway in which Henrik Ibsen grew up." Or that, "What I am suggesting is that the emphasis upon the gruesome and violent was, to a large extent, Lovecraft's way of keeping himself mentally healthy in the dull, stifling atmosphere of Providence." Or, once again, that he "was a frustrated product of a rainy provincial town."

It is my contention that Lovecraft would never have been Lovecraft without Providence — its history, its atmosphere, its legends, its peculiar and individual character — and that, genius that he was, it is not so much escape from but improvement on the rich native materials that lay in his own back yard that helps to make his tales so intriguing and so striking. Perhaps what I am really saying is that Lovecraft, like his Southern contemporary William Faulkner, is a great local color writer, who sometimes goes beyond the conventions of mere local color quaintness or picturesqueness in order to get at terrifying ambiguities having to do with the scope and status of human nature itself.

The city of Providence and the state of Rhode Island thus become for Lovecraft a kind of *prima materia* — a basic, irreducible substance — which he transmutes through the alchemy of his art into a rarefied and golden product. There was an almost symbiotic relationship between the author and his environment, and here Wilson's categorization of Lovecraft as a romantic would seem to be truly valuable, though there were actually two Lovecrafts — one classic and one romantic, one an eighteenth-century mind and one a nineteenth-century Gothic sensibility. The eighteenth-century side of his personality manifested itself in Lovecraft's admiration for colonial times, his sardonic skepticism, his view of himself as a detached spectator of the world and its problems, and his intense interest in science and technology. This attitude could sometimes become both escapist and defensive, although it also led Lovecraft to become, like his eighteenth-century counterpart Horace Walpole, one

Prolific letter writer H. P. Lovecraft adorns a note of May 14, 1933, with a sketch of his new home. The house has since been moved from 66 College Street to its present location at 65 Prospect Street.



Courtesy Brown University Library with permission of the Estate of August Derleth and his publishing firm Arkham House.

of the great letter writers of the century. At times he could sputter in a letter to a friend that "I thank the powers of the cosmos that I am a Rhode Island Englishman of the old tradition! Even if my culture-stream be a thinned and effete one, it is at least something as distinguished from nothing at all!" Indeed, he once turned down a high-paying job in Chicago during one of the most desperate periods of his life, simply because Chicago did not have any eighteenth-century buildings.

The other dimension of his character, the romantic, balanced off the wit, urbanity, rationality, and cosmopolitan nature of the classic side which comes through the letters. Lovecraft was like a man poised between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, and his choice of a Gothic form for writing reflects that literature which had developed at precisely this point in history. Thus Lovecraft chooses the mode of the "Gothic Novel," reminiscent of such thrilling and supernatural best-sellers of the 1790s

and 1800s as *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Monk*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and *Frankenstein*. His romantic dimension was embodied in that side of his personality which delighted in the weird, the ethereal, the remote, the shadowy, and the terrifying — a thrill for the sake of a thrill — though we have already noted that Lovecraft's science-fiction tales go beyond this toward Ann Radcliffe's shadowy "sublime." Closely connected with this predilection is what Wilson calls Lovecraft's "provinciality" and what I would call his sense of place — his love of the particular and peculiar atmosphere of a very definite and circumscribed locality, just as Wordsworth and the Lake Poets made the Lake District of England famous for its individual aura of beauty and picturesqueness. Lovecraft focuses on Providence and its outskirts so much so that, like many romantics, he develops an almost mystical attachment to the place he has chosen to celebrate in art. In a revealing letter to his aunts during his so-called "New York Exile" in the middle 1920s, when an anomalous marriage and the threat of out-and-out poverty had depressed his spirits, Lovecraft exclaimed that:

*To all intents and purposes I am more naturally isolated from mankind than Nathaniel Hawthorne himself, who dwelt alone in the midst of crowds, and whom Salem knew only after he had died. Therefore, it may be taken as axiomatic that the people of a place matter absolutely nothing to me except as components of the general landscape and scenery . . . My life lies not among people but among scenes — my local affections are not personal, but topographical and architectural . . . I am always an outsider — to all scenes and all people — but outsiders have their sentimental preferences in visual environment. I will be dogmatic only to the extent of saying that it is New England I must have — in some form or other. Providence is part of me — I am Providence. . . Providence would always be at the back of my head as a goal to be worked toward — an ultimate Paradise to be regain'd at last.<sup>6</sup>*

It would be difficult to find in literature a more complete identification of author and subject than this.

Lovecraft did at last regain his lost paradise, while at the same time he incorporated it into the substance of his tales and sketches. More specifically he made it the hub of a long fictional effort which has a particular relevance for those with an interest in any kind of historical endeavor. For his *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* is a fable about the problems of history itself and also a warning about the dangers of historical research. It concerns itself with a young antiquarian, Ward himself, who delves into the ancient history of his own past and finds there something so potent and so evil that at last it overwhelms and destroys him, thus embodying a typical Lovecraft theme. Yet it is not Ward but the city of Providence, with all of its history and traditions, which is really the main character of the book, as "Egdon Heath" is in Hardy's *Return of the Native*. However, since *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* is also the story of a sick mind, Providence appears in two aspects during the course of the narrative — it is both an Eden before the Fall of Man, and an Eden after the Fall of Man. And Lovecraft redoes Genesis by maintaining that Paradise is lost not through eating an apple but through reading an historical document, though the import of both Genesis and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* remain the same — dangerous love of knowledge, obsession with knowing itself. Before Ward finds out too much, Providence is to him a lyrical and romantic garden, place of gorgeous, fantastic architecture and rainbow skies. Thus Lovecraft writes of the young Charles, who still trails Wordsworthian clouds of glory —

*Sometimes, as he grew taller and more adventurous, young Ward would venture down into the maelstrom of tottering houses, broken transoms, bubbling steps, twisted balustrades, swarthy faces, and nameless odours, winding from South Main to South Water, searching out the docks where the bay and south steamers still touched, and returning northward at this lower level past the steep-roofed 1816 warehouses and the broad square at the Great Bridge, where the 1773 Market House still stands firm on its ancient arches. In that square he would pause to drink in the bewilder-*

6 Letter to Mrs. F. C. Clarke, MS., John Hay Library, Brown University.



ing beauty of the old town as it rises on the eastward bluff, decked with its Georgian spires and crowned by the vast new Christian Science dome as London is crowned by St. Paul's. He liked mostly to reach this point in the late afternoon, when the slanting sunlight touches the Market House and the ancient hill roofs and belfries with gold, and throws magic around the dreaming wharves where Providence Indiamen used to ride at anchor. After a long look he would grow almost dizzy with a poet's love for the sight, and then he would scale the slope homeward in the dusk past the old white church and up the narrow precipitous ways where yellow gleams would begin to peep out in small-paned windows and through fanlights set high over double flights of steps with curious wrought-iron railings.<sup>7</sup>

Now, anyone who has lived in Providence has probably seen exactly this sight and felt precisely this way — as late afternoon sunlight bathed College Hill in its glow — and what is interesting about Lovecraft's approach here, I think, is actually how realistic a writer he is, realistic in the sense of faithful reporting of

detail and minute attention to physical fact. Just because Lovecraft writes weird stories does not imply that the structure or method of those stories is similarly vague, awesome, or cumbersome, like some Frankenstein horror out of a bad film. A good deal of *Charles Dexter Ward* is made up of just this same sort of painstaking, factual description, obviously based upon Lovecraft's own direct and personal contact with the city he so loved. He warned his young weird-tale-writing friends that —

*To make a fictional marvel wear the momentary aspect of exciting fact, we must give it the most elaborate possible approach — building it up insidiously and gradually out of apparently realistic material, realistically handled. The time is past when adults can accept marvellous conditions for granted. Every energy must be bent toward the weaving of a frame of mind which shall make the story's departure from nature seem credible — and in the weaving of this mood the utmost subtlety and verisimilitude are required. In every detail except the chosen marvel, the story should be accurately true to nature. The keynote should be*

... the old town as it rises on the eastward bluff...  
crowned by the new Christian Science dome...

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that of scientific exploration — since that is the normal way of presenting a “fact” new to experience, and should not change as the story slides off from the possible to the impossible.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately Lovecraft often violated his own rule about being too realistic about the chosen marvel, the horrific monster who finally flaps his way in at the end. Here he also violates Mrs. Radcliffe's stricture against damaging the sublime at the expense of the particular, for as she warns, “They must be men of very cold imaginations with whom certainty is more terrible than surmise.” Monsters are so realistically detailed in certain Lovecraft stories that we tend to be disappointed; since Lovecraft had a constitutional aversion to seafood (“Fish of any kind . . . nauseates me beyond control,” he wrote a friend) these monsters often seem like plates of giant fried clams or creamed codfish blown up to unnatural size and endowed with predatory intent. But in *Charles Dexter Ward* Lovecraft's realism and his tight structure are at their height, and he even adds to the effect by introducing a good many documents and pseudo-documents as well. Thus we get extracts from ancient diaries and papers stored in The Rhode Island Historical Society and modern items from the *Providence Journal*, such as the one included under the headline “Nocturnal Diggers Surprised in North Burial Ground.”

“It was this morning discovered by Robert Hart, night watchman of the North Burial Ground,” Lovecraft fabricates, *that ghouls were again at work in the ancient portion of the cemetery. The grave of Ezra Weeden, who was born in 1740 and died in 1824 according to his uprooted and savagely splintered slate headstone, was found*

*excavated with a spade stolen from an adjacent tool shed. Whatever the contents may have been after more than a century of burial, all was gone except a few slivers of decayed wood. There were no wheel tracks but police have measured a single set of footprints which they found in the vicinity, and which indicate the boots of a man of refinement . . . Members of the Weeden family, notified of the happening, expressed their astonishment and regret; and were wholly unable to think of any enemy who would care to violate the grave of their ancestor. Hazard Weeden of 598 Angell Street recalls a family legend according to which Ezra Weeden was involved in some very peculiar circumstances, not dishonorable to himself, shortly before the Revolution; but of any modern feud or mystery he is frankly ignorant. Inspector Cunningham has been assigned to the case, and hopes to uncover some valuable clues in the near future (166).*

But what has led up to such ghastly incidents as these, joined to other strange and sinister phenomena, such as an outbreak of vampirism “around two distinct localities; the residential hill and the North End, near the Ward home at Olney Court, and the suburban districts across the Cranston line near Pawtuxet”? It can be traced simply to obsession with antiquarianism, genealogy, and historical research. Charles Dexter Ward, in exploring twigs and branches of his family tree, has come upon an ominous ancestor, Joseph Curwen, who fled to Providence soon after the witchcraft trials began in Salem. Curwen, he discovers after much delving and probing, was a wizard and alchemist,<sup>9</sup> aligned with certain dark powers who wish to return to earth, which they originally inhabited. Curwen has learned the secret of immortality, but his

7 H. P. Lovecraft, *Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, in *At the Mountains of Madness and Other Tales of Terror*, selected and with introd. by August Derleth (London, 1966) 108. Hereafter all references to the novel will appear parenthetically in the text.

8 Lovecraft, quoted by August Derleth in *HPL: A Memoir* (New York, 1945) 80.

9 Lovecraft takes the pains to tell us that “His birth was known to be good, since the Curwens or Carwens of Salem needed no introduction in New England.” “Curwen,” “Carwin,” or “Corwin” is indeed an old Salem name, a “Jonathan Corwin” being listed as a judge in the Salem witchcraft trials along with Nathaniel Hawthorne's ancestor, John Hathorne. The name however may also owe something to the first American author of “Gothic” tales, Charles Brockden Brown, whose ambiguous villain in the romance *Wieland* is named

“Carwin.” Lovecraft had previously borrowed the name of another Brown character, Arthur Mervyn, and changed it slightly to provide a title for his early tale, “Arthur Jermyn.” Lovecraft continued to use authentic local names in his work, and his protagonist in “Rats in the Walls,” a Mr. Delapore, owes his cognomen to Sarah Helen Whitman's genealogical researches, in which she believed she had traced both her maiden name (Power) and her fiancé Edgar Allan Poe's name back to a common Celtic source (Poer or Delapoer). The fact that Curwen is an alchemist reflects Lovecraft's early interest in the origins of scientific method (another early story was entitled “The Alchemist”) as well as his affinity to, and knowledge of, Hawthorne's works, for the theme of an alchemical “elixir of life” can be found both in Hawthorne's short tale “Birthmark” and the late, unfinished *Dolliver Romance*, while Lovecraft's mythic New England city “Arkham” is an uneasy combination of old Salem and old Providence.



dastardly plans and the cult he has been in league with are stopped right before the Revolutionary War by those same Rhode Islanders who banded together to burn the *Gaspee* and who finally defied tyrannical King George outright. Here Lovecraft performs a fascinating trick with the rich residue of local legend and tradition — the threat of Curwen and his unholy alliance with the devil actually becomes, according to Lovecraft's retelling, the first spark of the American Revolution, and Rhode Island in a real sense is thus not only the first colony to declare its independence from Great Britain, but also the first (and only one, for that matter) to declare its independence from the powers of evil and black magic.

Such personages of note as the first president of Brown University — James Manning — Dr. Bowen, Esek Hopkins, John Carter, Captain Mathewson, Captain Whipple, and all four of the Brown brothers, meet at such spots as Sabin Tavern or the "great room of Thurston's Tavern at the Sign of the Golden Lion on Weybosset Point across the bridge" in order to formulate plans for a raid against Curwen, who has retired to his farmhouse just off the Pawtuxet Road. Once again, all of this is handled with minute and documentary fidelity, as Lovecraft gleans his facts both from local history books and from legend in order to flesh out his fantasy as well as ground it in the solid substance of history itself. Thus we learn, for example, that James Manning was noted for possessing the largest periwig in the colonies, an historical fact, and that the girl whom Curwen manages to wed in a marriage of convenience, Eliza Tillinghast, worked in 1757 at the age of nine a sampler which "may still be found in the rooms of The Rhode Island Historical Society." Gradually Lovecraft leads us along as if we were reading history or newspaper to the final flapping horror, and the hoax is complete.

But *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* is not simply a hoax, or merely an intricate and ingenious retelling of Rhode Island history. It is a curious fable about uses of human knowledge and bounds of historical research for — as Ward searches out his own family history and comes up with the demonic figure of Joseph Curwen —

*Lovecraft uses local tradition to increase the believable quality of his story. He places evil Curwen's lonely farm in Pawtuxet not far from the location of the renowned Gaspee incident . . .*



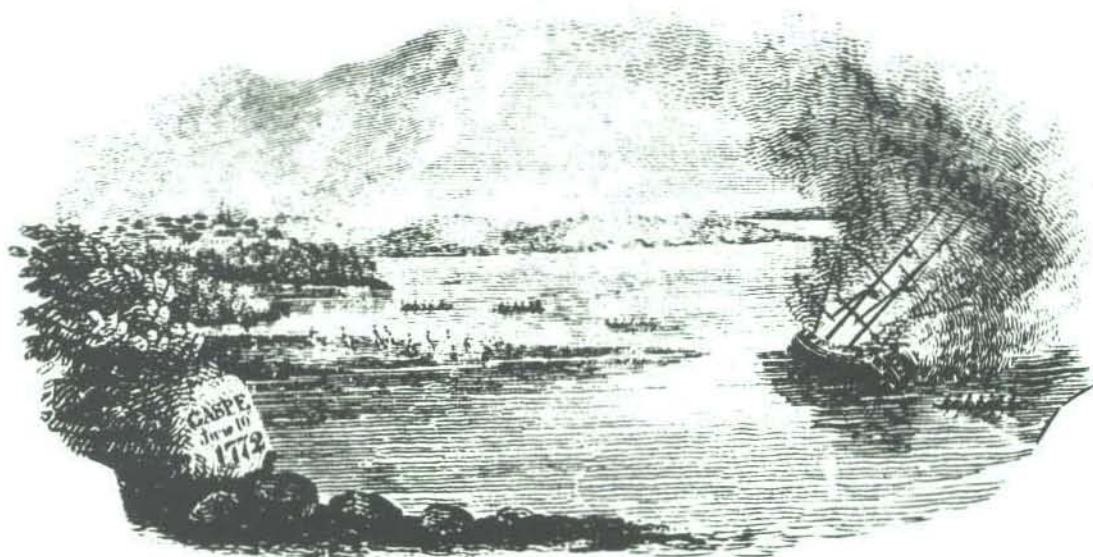
*Detail of drawing "Old Garrison House" by S. K. Luther, RIHS Library.*

he is an Everyman who also searches throughout the whole genealogical background of the family of man, an antiquarian who finds in the past of human beings only horror, atavism, bestiality, and perversion. The simple moral of *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* is that it is dangerous to know too much, especially about one's own ancestors. Lovecraft expresses this best in the beginning paragraph of another tale, *The Call of Cthulhu*, where he writes

*The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it is not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.<sup>10</sup>*

<sup>10</sup> Lovecraft, *Haunter of the Dark and Other Tales of Horror*, ed. August Derleth (London, 1969) 55.

... and brings about his villain's downfall by the vigilante efforts of the same famous Rhode Islanders who banded together to burn the Gaspee.



Charles Dexter Ward does indeed go mad, he does indeed sink into those black seas of infinity, but the instrument of his destruction is not science, but rather historical and genealogical research, and the infinity is not the infinity of outer space or the universe, but that infinity of the past — that sublime terror which Lovecraft in another short novel would call "The Shadow Out of Time." But what is even more horrible in the case of Charles Dexter Ward is that he is literally possessed by the past, which in the form of his ancestor Curwen re-animates itself in his body, usurps his mind, and plunges him fully into an alien and evil world. The process is slow and insidious, but Ward's accumulation of historical knowledge at first poisons his mind and then begins to warp his personality completely, as his eyes turn into the eyes of another man and his brain turns into the brain of an ancestor who died, or was supposed to have died, a hundred years before. It is this unholy knowledge of the past which accomplishes Ward's fall from grace and state of

Eden-like romanticism and happiness. And as Ward grows more and more possessed, similarly does his Providence environment grow more and more sinister. Compare, for example, Ward's impression of almost that same downtown scene, quoted before, with the following one, which occurs after Ward is already deep in those forbidden historical researches that have at last led him to explore libraries of certain unsavory counts whose home base is Transylvania. "Old Providence," Ward exclaims at his first sight of home:

*It was this place and the mysterious forces of its long, continuous history which had brought him into being, and which had drawn him back toward marvels and secrets whose boundaries no prophet might fix. Here lay the arcana, wondrous or dreadful as the case might be, for which all his years of travel and application had been preparing him. A taxicab whirled him through Post Office Square with its glimpse of the river, the Market House, and the head of the bay, and up the steep curved slope of Waterman Street to Prospect,*



*Halsey Mansion with its classic porch and stately bayed facade becomes the Providence home of Charles Dexter Ward.*



*Photograph by Laurence E. Tilley courtesy Camera Club of Providence.*

where the vast gleaming dome and sunset-flushed Ionic columns of the Christian Science Church beckoned northward. Then eight squares past the fine old brick estates his childish eyes had known, and the quaint brick sidewalks so often trodden by his youthful feet. And at last the little white overtaken farmhouse on the right, on the left the classic Adam porch and stately bayed facade of the great brick house where he was born. It was twilight, and Charles Dexter Ward had come home (155-156).

But he has also come home to a twilight of horror. Possessed completely by his ancestor Curwen, Ward begins to conjure up again all the evil and mischief supposedly eradicated by that party of colonial Rhode Island gentlemen who surprised the alchemist-wizard at work and annihilated him. Here, newspaper reports of bodies being stolen from North Burial Ground and the vampire scare in Cranston play their part, although Lovecraft once again bases a good deal of his fantasy on hard and concrete fact, for Sidney S. Rider, Rhode Island historian and antiquarian, actually does report a

real case of vampirism which occurred about the time of the outbreak of the American Revolution.<sup>11</sup>

Lovecraft's Curwen, returned in the person of Charles Dexter Ward, snatches bodies not to feast upon their blood but to feed upon their minds — as an alchemist, he has discovered the secret of re-animating their physical brains by reconstituting what is left of their "animal salts." As Lovecraft writes of Curwen and those who are in league with him:

*What these horrible creatures — and Charles Ward as well — were doing or trying to do seemed fairly clear from their letters and from every bit of light both old and new which had filtered in upon the case. They were robbing the tombs of all the ages, including those of the world's wisest and greatest men in the hope of recovering from bygone ashes some vestige of the consciousness and lore which had once animated and informed them (187).*

Once again, it is an unholy and obscene quest or even thirst for knowledge which remains Lovecraft's eldest primal sin. And for him there is only one salvation possible from the stain of this sin — one must descend into the depths of evil in order to combat it, one must risk madness oneself in order to conquer madness. Thus most Lovecraft stories, like most Poe tales, end with a descent into the maelstrom, a plunge into the pit which is also an exploration of the subconscious part of the human mind, what Freud called the Id and what Jung called the Collective Unconscious. It is only through this harrowing descent that the world can be saved from the evil which Curwen and others like him would unleash upon it. What is always found by those who descend into the Lovecraft maelstrom — usually cellar or cave — are bones and some unnameable, dark thing — bones of the past, bones which indicate man's own descent from Darwin's apes and anthropoids, and the Beast himself, the raging animal nature of man, always ready to spring forth from the jungle.<sup>12</sup> In *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* a courageous and conscientious doctor of psychiatry, Marinus Willett, accomplishes this descent and learns the secret of the cave at peril of losing his own reason altogether, which Lovecraft allegorizes as

11 J. Earl Clauson, "Vampirism in Rhode Island," *These Plantations* (Providence, 1937) 67-69.

12 Theme of two surviving pieces of Lovecraft juvenilia, "Beast in the Cave" and "White Ape," both dealing with cases of atavism and reversion to type.

the doctor's flashlight, giving some illumination to the fetid darkness. Here Lovecraft would seem to leave the "real" world altogether, but notice in the following description of a portion of Willett's journey how minute and detailed he is about this essentially psychological horror:

But Marinus Bicknell Willett was sorry that he looked again; for surgeon and veteran of the dissecting room though he was, he has not been the same since. It is hard to explain just how a single sight of a terrible object with measurable dimensions could so shake and change a man; and we may only say that there is about certain outlines and entities a power of symbolism and suggestion which acts frightfully on a sensitive thinker's perspective and whispers terrible hints of obscure cosmic relationships and unnameable realities behind the protective illusions of common vision. In that second Willett saw such an outline or entity, for during the next few instants he was undoubtedly as stark mad as any inmate of Dr. Waite's private hospital [where Charles Dexter Ward is presently confined]. He dropped the electric torch from a hand drained of muscular power or nervous co-ordination, nor heeded the sound of crunching teeth which told of its fate at the bottom of the pit. He screamed and screamed and screamed in a voice whose falsetto panic no acquaintance of his would ever have recognized, and though he could not rise to his feet, he crawled and rolled desperately away over the damp pavement where dozens of Tartarean wells poured forth their inexhaustible whining and yelping to answer his own insane cries. He tore his hands on the rough, loose stones, and many times bruised his head against the frequent pillars, but still he kept on. Then at last he slowly came to himself in the utter blackness and stench, and stopped his ears against the droning wail into which the burst of yelping had subsided. He was drenched with perspiration and without means of producing a light: stricken and unnerved in the abysmal blackness and horror, and crushed with a memory he could never efface. Beneath him dozens of those things still lived, and from one of the shafts the cover was removed. He knew that what he had seen could never climb up the

When Lovecraft's ultimate horror is realized only by the reactions of the one who faces it as in the case of Dr. Willett, he achieves a chilling effect. Less successful are his realistically described monsters as witness his drawing of Cthulhu.



To R. H. Barlow, Esq., whose Sculpture  
has given immortality to this trivial  
Design of his obli'd obit Servant  
Arthur H. Lovecraft  
16 May, 1934

Courtesy Brown University Library with permission of the Estate of August Derleth and his publishing firm Arkham House.

slippery walls, yet shuddered at the thought that some obscure foothold might exist (195-196).

This scene takes place in the cellar of the cottage which Ward has bought near Rhodes-on-the-Pawtuxet, but in Lovecraft there are always cellars beneath cellars and depths below depths. Here ultimate horror is not described, only the reactions of Dr. Willett who confronts it. And though his mind is nearly destroyed, Dr. Willett escapes with the secret which will finally save Providence and the world from the evil designs of Curwen and his quest for unholy knowledge and power. The secret itself is a magic formula that can reverse the alchemical process Curwen has set in motion, but it is not the formula alone which allows



the good doctor to rid the world of the fruit of Charles Dexter Ward's antiquarian research. The formula has to be supplemented by translation of a strange note in an unfamiliar language, which finally reveals that Ward and Curwen inhabit the same body, a body which must be destroyed. Yet means of deciphering this note, found to be written in "pointed Saxon miniscules of the eighth or ninth century A. D." is discovered at last in the John Hay Library of Brown University. For, if according to Christian tradition man is both lost and saved in a garden — the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane — then according to Lovecraft's mythology man is both lost and saved in a library. Locked away in the John Hay special collections can be found volumes like the "dreaded Necronomicon of the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred," the reading of which can drive men mad. But it is also the library which preserves not simply knowledge, but wisdom, which is the right use of knowledge, that wisdom of knowing when to stop which Charles Dexter Ward abandoned in searching back through his own genealogy and ancestry. The library only collects knowledge, it does not co-ordinate it, and so it remains the brake on human emotion and obsession, that small placid island

*Crayon drawing from a collection of illustrations apparently submitted to Lovecraft by admirers of his work.*

*Courtesy Brown University Library.*



of peace in the middle of those black seas of infinity. Thus the immediate effect of the library on Dr. Willett and on Charles Dexter Ward's father is to calm them and assure them of ultimate, rational success.

As Lovecraft writes:

*Willett and Mr. Ward were mute and baffled. They had met the unknown, and found that they lacked emotions to respond to it as they vaguely believed they ought. With Willett, especially, the capacity for receiving fresh impressions of awe was well nigh exhausted; and both men sat still and helpless till the closing of the library forced them to leave (207).*

So *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* comes to its natural, and perhaps even optimistic, end. Curwen is stopped and destroyed, though Ward himself must also pay the price of physical destruction in order to save his soul from eternal possession by the forces of darkness. And so Providence and the world return to normal, never knowing the fate they escaped or the evil that hovered about them on cosmic and malodorous wings. Yet I think, still in opposition to Colin Wilson, Lovecraft could never have conjured up the power of evil in the first place if he had not based the greater part of his narrative on the physical reality of Providence itself — its atmosphere, its lore, its picturesqueness, its history — that richness and fullness which Lovecraft only made more rich and more full. The relation of the author to his chosen place was symbiotic, if not mystical, with more in it perhaps than is dreamt of in our philosophies. Can the line between fact and fiction, reality and vision actually break down, Lovecraft was asking, and can that breakdown involve cosmically sinister consequences, sublime "terror" as well as psychological "horror"? I have quoted one of the pseudo-documents which Lovecraft includes in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, about the grave robbing of a colonial tomb in North Burial Ground. Now as a curious supplement to that, I offer the following from



the Providence Journal, June 26, 1968 — "Coffin, Man's Body Stolen from Cemetery in Cranston" —

A coffin and a man's body have been stolen from an historical cemetery in Cranston, and an almost completely decomposed body in a coffin was found yesterday . . . behind Esek Hopkins Junior High School in Providence.

Police are uncertain if the body and coffin, found about 4 behind the school are the same body and coffin taken from a tomb in Historical Cemetery 19 near 460 Scituate Avenue, Cranston.

The coffin with the body in it was found on the embankment facing the passing traffic on Route 146. Police said the front half of the top of the coffin was broken open, exposing the remains.

Cranston police said one of seven bodies was stolen sometime in the last two days from a large stone vault in the cemetery. The vault was entered through a heavy steel door, which was left ajar. . . .

The name N. S. Prior is chiseled over the door of the vault. Cranston city hall records say the tomb is registered to Nicholas S. Prior, a soldier in the Revolutionary War.

City Clerk Astrid D. Leidman said records indicate that he died in March, 1787. . . .

Police said that a copy of the Providence Journal, dated Aug. 26, 1945, was found inside the coffin. Dr. Edwin Vieira, state medical examiner, claimed the body. It was taken to the state morgue at Howard.

That, to be sure, is a rather morbid item, but even more it is a very "Lovecraftian" item. If anyone, after

reading this, would wish to investigate it more fully, look up all the facts, dig more deeply into its history. and peculiarity, they are certainly free to do so, but I am tempted to leave it where I found it — in a grisly little envelope marked "Bodies Found" in the newspaper "morgue" of the Providence Journal. It simply seems to be a natural part of the Providence that Lovecraft knew.

But just as the mythic and mystic Providence of *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* never really did know the total significance of the conjurations and black magic which was happening all around it, neither, strangely enough, does the real Providence seem to know, even today, the man who identified himself so completely with its uniqueness and its traditions. When he died in 1937, Lovecraft's passing went virtually unnoticed in the city where he had been born forty-seven years before — a city which he often compared lovingly to himself — "Providence," he wrote, "of the old brick sidewalks and the Georgian spires and the curving lanes of the hill, and the slat winds from over mouldering wharves where strange cargo ships of old have swung at anchor." He had added that he was "more naturally isolated from mankind than Nathaniel Hawthorne himself, who dwelt alone in the midst of crowds, and whom Salem knew only after his death," and it would have amazed Howard Phillips Lovecraft to think that some day he himself would be part of the legends of Providence, yet in its long and important history he remains alone in literary distinction — an outsider still, in his accomplishments and in his fame.

In a page of manuscript Lovecraft reproduces the pointed Saxon miniscules of the eighth or ninth century.

Courtesy Brown University Library with permission of the Estate of August Derleth and his publishing firm Arkham House.

pair, and furnished ~~to~~ ~~me~~ ~~the~~ ~~car~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~ ~~driven~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~library~~ ~~on~~ ~~the~~ ~~hill~~.  
Ward car + gave orders to be driven first to a quiet dining place + then to the John Hay

Ἐπισημὸν ἠλευθέρου ἔστ.  
Ἐὰς αὐτὴν ἀφ' ἑσπέρας ἀγγελοῦ ἠδὲ  
ἠε ἀληθῶς ἠέτη ἠδὲ ἠδὲ.  
Ἐὰς ἕτερον ἠε ἠε.

At the library it was easy to find ~~the~~ ~~library~~ ~~of~~ ~~palaeography~~, ~~to~~ ~~over~~ ~~these~~. ~~The~~ ~~two~~ ~~were~~ ~~puzzled~~ ~~till~~ ~~the~~ ~~lights~~ ~~of~~ ~~evening~~ ~~showed~~ ~~out~~ ~~from~~ ~~the~~ ~~great~~ ~~chandeliers~~. ~~In~~ ~~the~~ ~~end~~ ~~they~~ ~~found~~ ~~what~~ ~~was~~ ~~needed~~.  
good manuals  
invention



*Described by artist Edwin Whitefield in 1882 as probably built about 1750, "and soon after bought by William Caesar, a colored man," this house survived the nearby riots of 1824 and 1831. It remained at the corner of Hewes and North Main streets until the late 1800s when this picture was taken.*



## Social Turmoil and Governmental Reform in Providence, 1820-1832

by Howard P. Chudacoff and Theodore C. Hirt\*

Between 1820 and 1832 Providence experienced both the commercial and industrial expansion of a growing city as well as the social ferment and reform which characterized other American cities. Within this context two traumatic incidents—the "Hard-Scrabble" riot of 1824 and Olney's Lane riot of 1831—not only galvanized political changes but also underscored the tensions and disorientation of an unsettled period. These events blended issues of race and vice to produce heightened concern over public order, concern made acute by urbanization. The disorders thus had a significant role in stimulating reform of Providence's government and in forcing its citizens to acknowledge problems which a once small town never had to face. Until 1832 a town meeting, under leadership of the Town Council, handled the city government. Thereafter Providence joined the increasing number of American cities which operated under a more streamlined municipal administration embodied in a city charter.

Development of water and steam power, rise of the New England textile industry, and spread of local and long distance trade spurred rapid urbanization in Rhode Island, particularly in Providence.<sup>1</sup> Here employment opportunities in young industrial ventures lured immigrants from rural areas and fostered population growth, most of the increase coming within the laboring classes.<sup>2</sup> Aided by immigration and by efforts of organizations such as the Rhode Island Society for

the Encouragement of Domestic Industry, Providence reached a population of 17,000 by 1830, double the size of its former rival Newport.<sup>3</sup>

This economic and population growth was accompanied by a shift in the status of the fairly substantial black community in Providence. In 1790 some 475 blacks resided in the city, but by 1825 black population had grown to a reported 1,414, almost 10 per cent of the population.<sup>4</sup> During the early 1820s these people had begun to acquire some economic mobility and had coalesced into a visible residential entity. Many had moved out of traditional domestic occupations and had taken jobs as draymen in the textile factories although they were prohibited from becoming operatives. Moreover, a number of blacks had become apprentices and had entered skilled trades and crafts.<sup>5</sup> Where they had been scattered all over the city during the colonial period, they now began to acquire property and live closer together. Rough estimates indicate that in 1822 Providence blacks owned \$10,000 in property. The total reached \$18,000 by 1830 and nearly \$40,000 by 1839. In addition by 1830 half lived in their own homes.<sup>6</sup> A black leader, William J. Brown, noted in his memoirs that Providence blacks began to live closer together because cheap land on the outskirts of town was available to them and because they desired to develop their own religious, social, and educational institutions, free from the hostility of white neighbors. Thus they moved to the area of Addison Hollow,

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1 Kurt Mayer, *Economic Development and Population Growth in Rhode Island* (Providence, 1953) 30-34.

2 Irving Richman, *Rhode Island, A Study in Separatism* (Cambridge, 1905) 258-85.

3 Edward Field, ed., *State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations at the End of the Century: A History* (Boston, 1902) 1:305.

4 Field 1:312-13 and Irving Bartlett, *From Slave to Citizen, Story of the Negro in Rhode Island* (Providence, 1954) 25.

5 Julian Rammelkamp, "Providence Negro Community, 1820-1842," *Rhode Island History* 7:1 (January 1948) 22.

6 Rammelkamp, 23.



known as "Hard-Scrabble," near the terminus of the Providence-Worcester Canal north of Smith Street and to residences on Olney's Lane.<sup>7</sup>

Growth of the black community provoked increasing hostility from local whites. Racial fear had long simmered in Providence and had occasionally led to specific acts of discrimination. In 1806, for example, the town watch was directed to enforce a 10 p.m. curfew against "persons of color" and to "commit them to the bridewell" if they refused to comply. At the same time outsiders were prohibited from visiting residences of blacks after curfew hour.<sup>8</sup> State law disfranchised blacks in 1822, and these years witnessed increasing efforts to disperse blacks from Rhode Island, ultimately to colonize them in Liberia.<sup>9</sup> These and other restrictions reflected a double-layered attitude. Not only did they ascribe innate inferiority to blacks, but they also identified blacks with vice, dissolution, and lack of civilization. Resulting racial tensions exploded in acts of civil disorder which in turn prodded the city government to adopt new methods of preserving peace.

Providence's role as a prominent seaport tended to exacerbate both racial hostility as well as the general problem of disorder and vice. Quite early in the nineteenth century, black neighborhoods became locations for saloons, brothels, and flophouses frequented by sailors and other types eager to let off steam. In his memoirs, William J. Brown complained that "this class of bad men and women" was a plague on virtuous

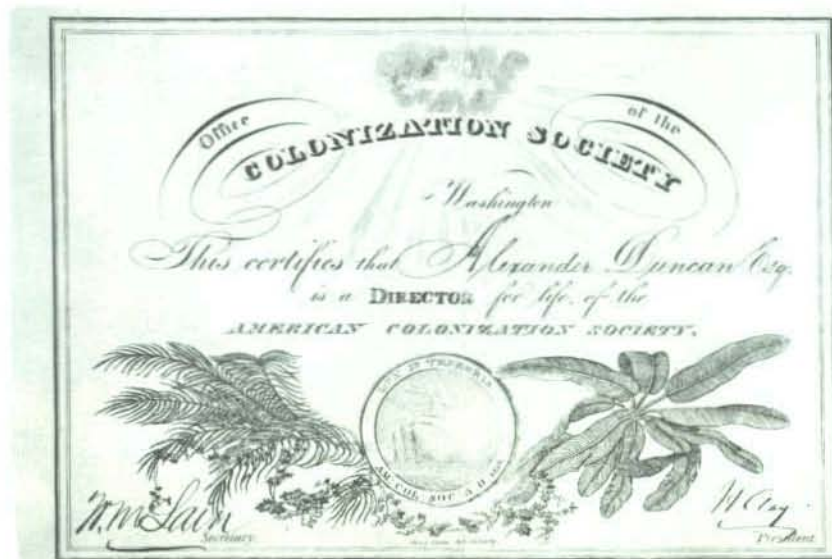
people of the neighborhood, who were without protection.<sup>10</sup> Sailors "apt to indulge in uproarious revelry" and blacks were accused of accounting for the largest segment of the criminal population.<sup>11</sup>

The "Hard-Scrabble" riot of 1824 exemplifies the kind of explosion which could occur when the lowest economic classes of whites collided with the local blacks. It began in October when some blacks had tried to "maintain the inside walk in their peregrinations in town," in obvious defiance of racial taboo, and the usual "bickerings and hostilities" ended in "a sort of battle royal."<sup>12</sup> The following night a large number of whites, incensed by the incident, assembled on the Great (Weybosset Street) Bridge and "after some consultation" invaded the black section known as Hard-Scrabble "which they almost laid in ruins." The principal target of this mob of 50 or 60 (with the approval of at least 100 spectators) was apparently no innocent dwelling but, in the words of attorney Joseph L. Tillinghast, "a dance hall" where the "party-colored votaries of pleasure assemble together, and the smoke of their incense went up to Heaven." Tillinghast defended those whites arrested during the disturbance, and his strategy turned the trials into an indictment of the neighborhood's vice and pictured the riot as a vigilante effort at moral reform.

The town constabulary, which to this time had rarely consisted of a force of over twelve men, had been conspicuously inactive during both nights of disorder,

*Alexander Duncan, Providence business leader and philanthropist, became a director of the American Colonization Society founded to encourage blacks' emigration to Africa.*

*RHS Library.*





as one of its constables, Samuel V. Allen, confessed during the trials. He admitted that authorities had been warned of the second night of violence but that he and his file leader "did not think it proper or prudent to interfere" with the mob, just as firemen would not extinguish a blaze which had reached a dangerous state. Allen stated that he knew of Hard-Scrabble, but since "the place was celebrated in the annals of the Watchmen, he always kept as far from it as possible and only went there when his duty imperiously called him. He never flinched from his duty as watchman."

Others besides the watchmen remained inert; no one else attempted to dissuade the mob from venting their anger. Even a member of the Town Council was present but he too remained silent.

During the trials arguments of both defense and prosecution tended to revolve around principles rather than facts of the case. Tillinghast attempted to depict the incident as an expression of popular will acting for the common good in place of an impotent government. The defense labeled Hard-Scrabble "a notorious nuisance" and welcomed its destruction. Tillinghast charged that the area was "the resort of the most corrupt part of the black population" whose members robbed white masters and employers to support their "disgusting scenes." He reminded the jury how the neighborhood secured its name (an area from which one might have to scrabble) and that it was characterized more by "shuffling" than by *minuet de court*. In his summation Tillinghast hardly concealed his approval of the heroic citizens who had destroyed "this sink of vice," certainly no "sober citizen" could regret the action.

*The renowned city of Hard-Scrabble has burned in its magnificent ruins! Like the ancient Babylon it has fallen with all its graven images, its tables of impure oblation, its idolatrous rights and sacrifices, and my client stands here charged with having invaded this classic ground and torn down its altars and its beautiful temples.*

Prosecution strategy of Attorney General Dutée

Pearce, like Tillinghast a prominent local politician, focused almost exclusively on the issue of order, questioning whether rioters were the proper people to "direct the morals of the town." Pearce asserted that any insults which "whites may have suffered" from the "numerous black population" were irrelevant to the case at hand and that blacks who were orderly should enjoy equal protection of law. Pearce also warned that mob action could not be tolerated in a town "so much celebrated for its morals and for orderly conduct" and that it was time some effectual measures be taken.

Defense arguments prevailed, as the jury acquitted the first two defendants and the state dropped charges against the rest. Still the trials reflected important local sentiment in 1824. Although the riot had resulted in no deaths and moderate damage, it shocked much of the community and kindled debate not only on issues of race but also on those of law and order, reform, and leadership. The anonymous compiler of a pamphlet summarizing the trials of those arrested expressed prevalent attitudes for change. While he admitted that there were a great many "industrious and honest individuals" in the black population, he also believed that most blacks could hardly be called "a valuable acquisition to any community," so that "their return to the respective places from whence they came" would hardly be calamitous for Providence. He blamed the laxity of police for permitting accumulation of a black population "ascertained by a recent enumeration, to be upwards of 1200 persons," while at the same time he censured townspeople for tolerating mob rule which had followed black excesses. Solution to the entire crisis, he believed, lay in reforming the outmoded town-meeting, council form of government:

*... there is a tardiness and inefficiency in the nature of our municipal government (we do not refer to its officers who have uniformly discharged their duties with vigilance and ability) which, as we increase in population, it may become necessary to exchange for a form that will not in fact be more despotic than the*

7 William J. Brown, *Life of William J. Brown of Providence, R.I. with Personal Recollections of Incidents in Rhode Island* (Providence, 1883) 89.

8 Henry Mann, *Our Police: History of the Providence Force from the First Watchman to the Latest Appointee* (Providence, 1889) 33.

9 Rammelkamp, 29.

10 Brown, 89.

11 "History of Police of Providence, Part 1," Rhode Island Collection of Sidney Rider from Providence newspapers, John Hay Library, Brown University.

12 Quoted references in this and following paragraphs are from *Hard-Scrabble Calendar*, Report of the Trials of Oliver Cummins, Nathaniel G. Metcalf, Gilbert Humes and Arthur Farrier, who were indicted with six others for a Riot, and for aiding in pulling down a Dwelling-House, on the 18th of October, at Hard-Scrabble (Providence, 1824) 32p.



undefined powers of a Town Council, but which is fitted to carry these powers into speedy and efficient operation, as exigencies may require.

The *Providence Gazette* took a similar stance, labeling the black population a "burden" and calling for a census to determine how many could be made useful citizens and how many should be evicted from town.<sup>13</sup>

The period from 1825 to 1831 was marked by heightened discussion of problems of race, vice, and order. Response of the Town Council was to implement minor reforms in the police force. Late in 1825 the Council enacted measures to tighten the "security of the town from rioters and disorderly persons." The night watch was increased to 24 men and was sent out on the streets at an earlier hour in the evening. Also captains were given greater authority.<sup>14</sup> In spite of these reforms, the *Literary Cadet and Saturday Evening Bulletin* complained of the Council's tolerance of continued disorder in Hard-Scrabble, home of a "race of outlawed negroes and abandoned whites":

*Robberies have been committed there, assaults and batteries are nightly perpetrated, and it is made the common receptacle of stolen property, a harbor for vagabonds, incendiaries, and murderers, a vile place never existed and compared with it, St. Giles of London is a school of morality.*<sup>15</sup>

By the end of the 1820s the drive for a stronger form of government in Providence had gained momentum. Specifically, some reformers pressed for a full-time police magistrate with extensive powers and for a central agency "where . . . the suppression of disorder and the protection of personal and proprietary rights may be promptly and effectively obtained."<sup>16</sup> In April 1829 freemen of Providence voted 312-222 to petition the General Assembly for a city charter. The Assembly assented but required that the new charter be approved by three-fifths of the voters because the petition vote had been so close. In a new election on February 15, 1830, the *status quo* forces prevailed; the new charter

won a majority but only by 385-355, far short of three-fifths. Resistance to change had not weakened enough.<sup>17</sup>

This period was also marked by increased fear of crime, particularly as news of disorders in other cities reached Providence. Thus "incendiaries" reputedly hiding in the Hollow near the canal were tied to a series of local alarms, both real and imagined. Newspapers were quick to cite rumored attempts by blacks and other lower classes to commit arson in Charleston, Norfolk, Petersburg, Albany, Savannah, and Boston; and they added those of Providence to this "black catalogue."<sup>18</sup> Accompanying fear of violence was the crusade against liquor. In 1827 Providence's first temperance society meeting was held at Mechanics' Hall. The society aimed at helping "the indigent persons of this town" with remedies as extreme as "Dr. Chambers' Medicine for the cure of Intemperance."<sup>19</sup> The crusade's efforts focused primarily upon clerks, servants, and "laboring classes" and voiced belief that moral and religious reform could curb disorder. At the same time, however, even more humanitarian efforts were undertaken to aid lower classes. The Society for Supplying the Poor with Cheap Fuel and a movement to abolish imprisonment for debt addressed common economic problems.<sup>20</sup> Yet all of these features — publicity of urban unrest, attempts at moral reform, and relief of economic hardship — reflected growing consciousness of the lower classes and of dangers of class and racial conflict.

It was the destructive riot of September 21-24, 1831 which signaled full transformation of Providence into a developed urban community replete with all the problems of discipline and which served as the final catalyst for municipal change. As in the case of 1824, the specific event which triggered the disorder remains obscure, though it was apparently a row between some white seamen and local blacks on Olney's Lane.<sup>21</sup> There, a group of white steamboat men, having been bested by some blacks in a saloon brawl, went out on

13 Bartlett, 30.

14 Mann, 36. Ironically at the same time the Council slashed funds for the school for black children. *Rhode Island American and Providence Gazette*, November 29, 1825.

15 Nov. 26, 1826.

16 *Rhode Island American and Providence Gazette*, April 28, 1826.

17 William R. Staples, *Annals of the Town of Providence From Its First Settlement to the Organization of the City Government* (Providence, 1843) 396.

Crusader against liquor Charles Jewett, early lecturing agent for the Rhode Island Temperance Society, symbolized the evils of drink in his lithograph "Death on the Striped Pig." Striped Pig was the popular term for Massachusetts speak-easies.



Detail of lithograph by Charles Jewett, 1839, Rhode Island. RIHS Library.

the street and asked for aid from some white sailors from the *Ann & Hope* who were either out on a "cruise" or looking for a cook who had deserted. By this time over a hundred people had gathered, ready for an "affray," and accompanied by the sailors they moved

up the lane into the black residential section.<sup>22</sup> There marchers were pelted by stones thrown from some windows, and they replied in kind. Suddenly a black man stepped from one of the buildings. Holding a pistol, he reportedly cried, "Is this the way the blacks

18 *Rhode Island American and Providence Gazette*, Jan. 10, 31, April 21, Aug. 11, 1826.

19 *ibid.* July 13, 1827.

20 *ibid.* Jan. 27, Sept. 26, 1826; May 1, 18, 1827.

21 *History of the Providence Riots From Sept. 21 to Sept. 24, 1831* [Providence, 1831] 20p., introduction.

22 An account written some fifty years later asserted that the fight had been between black and white seamen. Brown, 95. Report of committee investigating the riot, written in 1831, contained no reference to black seamen. *Providence Riots*, 8.



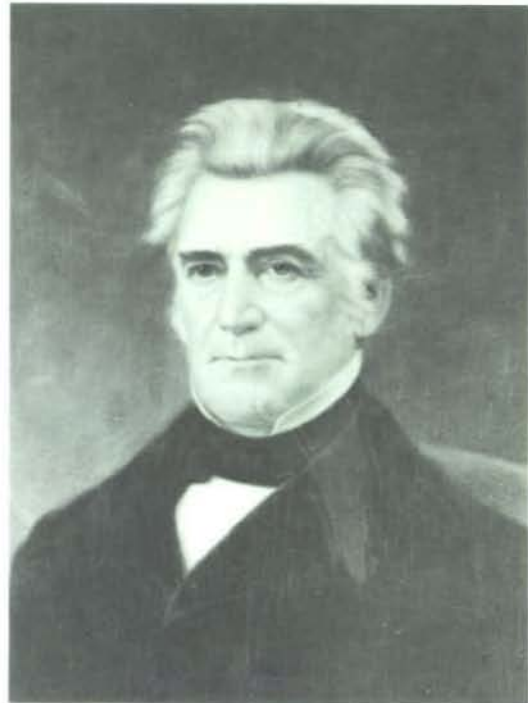
are to live, to be obliged to defend themselves from stones?" A shot rang out, exactly who fired is unclear, but one of the white sailors fell, mortally wounded.<sup>23</sup>

Next day the mob reassembled. There was now "great excitement," for a black had allegedly killed a white. In spite of the presence of the watch, sheriff, governor, and part of the First Light Infantry, the rioters overpowered lawmen and sacked Olney's Lane district all evening. An eyewitness reported that they used fire hooks and axes to pull down buildings, stationing sentinels and working "as busy as bees." The street was crowded with spectators, "a great many of whom were cheering the mob every time a house fell."<sup>24</sup> The following day, Friday, was generally calm as the Town Council increased civilian patrols and ordered five companies of militia. A few prisoners taken earlier were released for lack of evidence.

The situation boiled up again on Saturday, the 24th. "A great crowd" assembled on Smith's Bridge, filling Canal Street, and moved on the shanty town at dusk. Troops advanced but were surrounded and pelted by stones and brickbats. Governor Lemuel Arnold addressed the crowd, warning that soldiers' muskets were loaded and that it was "the determination of the peace officers to perform their duty at every hazard." But his appeal was answered by insults. William S. Patten, justice of the peace, read the riot act, but the mob refused to move, taunting, "fire and be damned!" Further jostling forced troops to fire into the air. This having no effect, several volleys were directed into the rioters. Four died, and many more were wounded, but the shots finally dispersed the crowd.<sup>25</sup>

A town meeting the next day denounced the mob and defended the militia as having been "indispensably necessary to the existence of civil government in this town." The Council lamented the killing of rioters, but it condemned "open and lawless attack upon private property." It also hoped that the incident would convince the "deluded and misguided" that there was "utter hopelessness in overaweing the Civil Authorities," and it commended both civil and military forces for their behavior. The meeting then appointed a

*Governor Lemuel Hastings Arnold.*



*From portrait by James Sullivan Lincoln, in the State House.*

committee of fourteen prominent citizens "to prepare and publish a correct statement of facts, relative to the riots . . ."

The report of this committee showed genuine concern for civil government in Providence and addressed itself to ways of preventing future disorders. It repeated earlier indictments of Olney's Lane as a section containing certain houses "tenanted chiefly by idle blacks of the lowest stamp" as well as an "indiscriminate" mixture of whites and blacks. It admitted that the neighborhood fomented not only "ordinary evils of houses of ill fame" but also "severe and bloody affrays . . . frequent, bold and open riots" which had endangered homes of the respectable. Thus the committee advocated "a prompt, speedy, and effectual remedy" to this "continued menace." But it also carried its

23 *Providence Riots*, 9. Brown, 95.

24 John A. C. Randall to Mowry Randall, September 25, 1831, MS., John Hay Library.

25 Quoted references in this and following paragraphs are from *Providence Riots*, complete citation in note 21.

26 Sept. 24, Oct. 1, Nov. 12, 1831.

recommendations beyond purely racial and moral issues, for it linked collapse of tranquility to faulty and ineffective government. The report asserted that

*of all the evils that can be inflicted upon civil society, that of a lawless and ferocious mob is the most capricious in its objects, the most savage in its means, and the most extensive in its consequences.*

Had government acted to quell the disturbance, "utter prostration of all law and order" would not have occurred, and "stern, vindictive, and revengeful passions" could have "slumbered in repose."

The committee's response was to reiterate need for tighter law enforcement, if not through adoption of a city charter, then through centralization of power in a single executive magistrate. It stated that the Town Council had only legislative and judicial power and cited the need for one man to be responsible for administration of police functions rather than the council where authority was dispersed. During the riots governor, sheriff, and local officials had differed over enforcement powers, and the committee wished to prevent a recurrence of such bickering. It did not propose creation of a mayor for Providence but rather greater authority for the president of the Town

Council. This official would be given broad, defined responsibilities to meet social and moral problems which attended urbanization. He would visit all parts of town daily to ascertain who belonged and who did not. He could order suspicious persons out of town and report to the Council on "infected places" and "suspicious houses." In one sense these recommendations implied preservation of small town society in which everyone knew his neighbor and informed controls enforced discipline. On the other hand, they represented a break with the past by more rigorously structuring responsibility for maintaining public peace.

Newspaper reaction to the riots and to the committee report indicated increased concern for preserving order and security under a new form of government. In the weeks following, the *Republican Herald*, while characterizing destruction of Olney's Lane as no loss, nevertheless denounced the mob and admitted a long tradition of "outrages on blacks." It also urged "energetic" measures and lectured that a municipal form of government would have prevented "this disgraceful affair."<sup>26</sup> Five days after the local incident the *Providence Journal* used a story on civil disturbance in Warsaw to express hope for a "universal detestation"

# 100 Dollars REWARD.

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

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

A true copy: Witness,

**RICHARD M. FIELD, C. Clerk.**



of mob rule. Even despotic government, it said, was preferable when "life, liberty, and property" are jeopardized and the "destinies of all are determined by the brutal force of infuriated madmen."<sup>27</sup> There was thus general recognition that the riots and threat of mob rule had stained the city's reputation and would probably doom further growth unless remedied with prompt action. The old pattern of life had been upset. It was with shock that the investigating committee had lamented

*Perhaps no place in this country of an equal extent of population, has been more distinguished for the quiet and orderly conduct of its inhabitants than this town has generally been; and at no former period, since the settlement of the town has it ever been necessary to quell a disturbance and support the majority of the laws by military force.<sup>28</sup>*

Citizens of Providence were quick to endorse the change. A town meeting of October 5, 1831 decided with one dissenting vote "that it is expedient to adopt a city form of government." On October 22 the General Assembly was petitioned for a new charter by a vote of 471 to 175 and the next month the charter was approved by 459 to 188, thereby complying with the

*Mayor Bridgham cited his support of Dexter Asylum for the poor and insane as evidence of his belief in reform.*

Assembly's three-fifths proviso.<sup>29</sup> The new charter provided for a mayor, six aldermen elected at large, and twenty-four councilmen elected four from each ward. The new government incorporated several features from earlier suggested reforms but also contained something new. While the charter offered for adoption in 1829 had vested principal police power in the mayor, urging him to be vigilant and active in enforcement of laws and giving him aid of a special police court, the new document responded to disorder and vice more severely.<sup>30</sup> Now the mayor could jail for twenty-four hours "any dissolute person" who would be "revelling in the street," fighting, or otherwise being disorderly. He could also search any building under "reasonable cause" if he thought it inhabited by "persons of ill fame, or to which persons of dissolute, idle, or disorderly character are suspected to resort." In addition, he assumed all power formerly possessed by the sheriff with regard to enforcement of the riot act.<sup>31</sup>

Providence's new government was launched in 1832, and the inauguration speech of the first mayor, Samuel W. Bridgham, reflected response of city leaders to imperatives of urbanization. He saluted the Town Council for its past efforts, especially in a "year fraught



DEXTER ASYLUM IN 1869.




with uncommon difficulties and trials" and announced he would be an active administrator, capable of leading Providence in its new responsibilities. He stated he would follow the maxim of "enforce or repeal" and promised he would faithfully execute all laws with the help of the police rather than allowing them to be "violated with impunity."<sup>32</sup> Bridgham reassured citizens that public power had not diminished as a result of charter reform and that Providence had only made the transition from "pure" to "representative" democracy because the city had become "too heterogeneous and unmanageable" to follow an older pattern.<sup>33</sup> Bridgham also declared himself a vigorous reformer, citing his support of Dexter Asylum for the poor and insane, for Sunday schools, and for free public education. He warned the "opulent" that if they wished to live in an orderly society, "free from excess, outrage, and crime," then they should support his cause lest vice spring up out of ignorance.<sup>34</sup> Finally, he predicted a bright future and attempted to rally the people under the banner of progress:

*Every thing physical, intellectual, and moral in our country, daily receives fresh impulse, and is marching on with steam-boat and railroad speed upon the highway of improvement, and we must strive to keep pace with others in this march and live up to the spirit of the age.*<sup>35</sup>

Governmental change in Providence was not only a response to local disequilibrium but also a correlate to the reform fervor of the Jacksonian era. In its report, the committee investigating the 1831 riots went beyond immediate issues and pointed to "want of education" and "extreme poverty" as underlying explanations for disorder.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, at the same time that residents were discussing problems of violence, they were also experiencing an accelerating campaign from advocates of temperance and poor relief. One organization which seemed to receive considerable support from prominent citizens was the Providence Society for the Encouragement of Faithful Domestic Servants, founded early in

Popularity of steamboat travel is indicated by these notices in the Providence Patriot and Columbian Gazette Wednesday, September 21, 1831.

**THE NEW-YORK AND BOSTON AND R. ISLAND AND NEW-YORK**



Steam Boat Arrangements for August, 1831.  
**BENJ. FRANKLIN, Capt. E. S. BUNKER.**  
**BOSTON, Wm. Comstock**  
**PRESIDENT, R. S. BUNKER.**

The respective Companies, having formed a daily Line, between Providence and New-York, will commence running the first of August, in the following order

Leaving Providence at 12 M. Monday 1st Aug. President: Tuesday 2d, Benj. Franklin; Wednesday 3d, Boston; Thursday 4th, President; Friday 5th, Franklin; Saturday 6th, Boston.

From New York 5 P. M. Monday Aug. 1st, Boston; Tuesday 2d, President; Wednesday 3d, Franklin; Thursday 4th, Boston; Friday 5th, President, Saturday 6th, Franklin;—and continuing each boat, taking their respective days as above for one month.


These splendid Steam Packets are each propelled by two separate Low Pressure Engines, and heavy Copper Boilers. Said Boats stop at the Long Wharf, Newport, going and returning.

For further information, apply to the Masters on board their respective Boats, or to  
**S. B. MUMFORD,**  
**COOKE & BROWN, or**  
**HUMPHRY & EVERETT**

aug 6

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**\$3—TO NEW-YORK—\$3—Fare Reduced.**  
**MEALS EXTRA.**



THE splendid low pressure steam packet **CHANCELLOR LIVINGSTON**—Capt. Thayer. will resume her trips on **SATURDAY,** the 6th inst.

**ARRANGEMENT FOR AUGUST.**  
 Leave Providence  
 ON Monday and Thursday at 1 o'clock P. M. and New-York on Tuesday and Saturdays at 5 P. M.

Freight taken at low rates. Apply on board, or at 36 South Water street,  
 aug 6 **PETER F. EWER & CO.**

27 Oct. 29, 1831.

28 *Providence Riots*, introduction.

29 "Providence and Vicinity, What Cheare, netop . . .," clippings from *Providence Journal*, 1880s, Rider Collection.

30 *City Charter*, Proposed for the Adoption of the Freeman of Providence at a Town Meeting To Be Holden April 29, 1829. Printed for the use of the Freeman, by order of the Town.

31 *Charter of the City of Providence*, and the act of the General Assembly for organizing the government under

the same, passed at October session, 1831. Together with a list of the city officers for the year 1832. Also the Mayor's Address to the City Council, delivered at the organization of the city government, June 4th, 1832 (*Providence*, 1832) 4.

32 *Charter*, 18, 35.

33 *Charter*, 18-19.

34 *Charter*, 21.

35 *Charter*, 31-33.

36 *Providence Riots*, introduction.



*Providence's new government was inaugurated June 4, 1832, in the old State House.*



*Engraving from Map of Providence County, 1851, by H. F. Walling.*

1831. Its president was Mayor Bridgham himself, and its roster included many men who were participants in the drive for a new city charter. The Society lamented what it saw as a decline in obedience, service, and morality of servants — particularly black ones — but

it also showed concern for unemployment and under-education of the city's blacks.<sup>37</sup>

At first glance the issue of race appears to have been the major component in the Providence riots, and indeed it would be difficult to deny the importance of racial friction. Resentment toward blacks had long simmered inside the city, particularly among white lower classes. When violence erupted in 1824 and 1831, white manual laborers seem to have been main participants. Those arrested for rioting in Hard-Scrabble were labeled "gentlemen, alias laborers, alias traders" and were probably unskilled workers and seamen.<sup>38</sup> In 1831 the four killed when troops fired into rioters included a sailor, a shoemaker, a book-binder, and a paper hanger.<sup>39</sup>

Yet race was not the only variable involved in these disorders — their incidents fit within a larger context of urban growth and change. Increase in vice and disorganized violence; social breakdown of the old, village sense of community; decline of the influence of the church; rise in intemperance, plus an increasing awareness by middle and upper classes of need for reform — all signified that the transportation and commercial-industrial revolutions of the early nine-

*In 1867 Market House, renamed the City Building, became headquarters for city government.*



teenth century were undercutting old patterns of political and social authority.

Almost every segment of society experienced some kind of turmoil, and the zeal of the era prompted community leaders not only to advocate social change but also to justify vigilante action in place of inert government — as Tillinghast had done with regard to the Hard-Scrabble affair. During the 1820s and 1830s Rhode Islanders were jostled by political factionalism, newspaper wars, agitation over the American system, friction between Providence and rural interests, disputed elections, and resentment of “subversive free-masons.” There were also recurring attempts to widen the restrictive suffrage (culminating in the Dorr rebellion of 1841), labor agitation, and constant debates over public education, abolitionism, colonization, and liquor licensing.<sup>40</sup> While these factors did not bear directly upon Providence’s problems of race, vice, and disorder, they undoubtedly helped to create the ferment and confusion which surrounded the violence of these years.

Providence disorders of 1824 and 1831 confirm two further notions: that a larger proportion of violence in America has occurred in urban settings and that social conflict extends far back into this country’s history. Both Rhode Island and the entire country experienced tremendous urban growth after 1820, and urbanization grouped people together in unprecedented numbers, a trend which in turn boosted the probability of tension between groups. During this period American cities were in constant flux, and they lacked effective police forces and governments to cope with conditions which often induced outbreaks of violence.

In his study of Philadelphia and its problems with race and disorder, Sam Bass Warner, Jr. has noted the complex changes caused by “industrialization, immigration, mixed patterns of settlement, changing styles of leadership, weakness of municipal institutions, and shifting orientations of politics” which occurred during the Jacksonian period.<sup>41</sup> Several riots in the Quaker City, particularly the 1834 incident at a carousel in a vice-ridden section of town, resembled the Providence disorders. Warner has seen these outbreaks within the

*City Hall's cornerstone was laid in June 1875 and the new building was dedicated in 1878.*



*From stereograph by Leander Baker.*

context of an interim period, taking place before much of the violent agitation could be absorbed into channels of organized politics. Indeed the political watershed in Rhode Island came with the Dorr War, after which the franchise was finally extended to all freemen.<sup>42</sup> Like Philadelphia and many other cities, Providence was undergoing a commercial, industrial, and transportation boom and faced need to change its form of government to handle demands of new urban discipline. The friendly constable now had to be replaced by professionals, and the old Town Council had to give way to stronger structure and more active leadership. The new charter of 1832 by no means insured municipal peace and harmony for future decades, but it did culminate a series of events which broke with the past and heralded a new age.

37 *Providence Society for the Encouragement of Faithful Domestic Servants, First Annual Report* (Providence, 1832) 6.

38 *Hard-Scrabble Calendar*, 1.

39 *Providence Riots*, 18.

40 Field 1:317-30.

41 Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City, Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968) 125-27.

42 Rammelkamp, 29-32.



William Hull was one of five sailors from the Ann & Hope involved in the Olney's Lane riot. Eighth on this list.

he was evidently ready to sail for Batavia and Canton only a fortnight after the fracas.

Custom House Papers, RIHS Library.

**LIST OF PERSONS** composing the Crew of the *Ship Ann & Hope* of *Genl*  
*Martin Page* bound for *Batavia & Canton*

Names.	Places of Birth.	Places of Residence.	Of what country citizens or subjects.	Aged years.
Thomas Holden Junr.	Warwick, N. H.	Warwick	United States	28
Gardner Brown	Newbury, Massachusetts	Newbury	"	26
Payton S. Howard	Newport, R. I.	Newport	"	21
Samuel Allen	Providence, R. I.	Providence	"	24
Wick Smith	Providence, R. I.	"	"	22
Borden Lake	Warwick, N. H.	"	"	27
John Willard	Long Point, Maine	"	"	40
William Hault	Providence, R. I.	"	"	19
Thomas Hought	Mathias Grant, Virginia	"	"	18
Jerome L. King	Wisc., New Hampshire	"	"	20
Amasa Cook	Franklin, Massachusetts	"	"	33
John Lawler	Superior, California	"	"	27
George C. King	Providence, R. I.	"	"	18
Alfred Brombee	Providence, R. I.	"	"	18
Joseph C. Costa	"	"	"	17
Alexander Thompson	"	"	"	17
George Mathewson	Providence, R. I.	"	"	15
George Foster	Providence, R. I.	"	"	36
Wm Bours	Newport, R. I.	"	"	39
George W. Luther	Providence, R. I.	"	"	21
James Cochran	Baltimore, Maryland	"	"	23
Fredrick A. Olney	Providence, R. I.	"	"	14
John Green	Sweden	"	Sweden	45
John Roberts	Peru	"	Peru	24
Robert Wilson	East Port, Maine	"	United States	22
Thomas Palmer	England	"	Spain & Britain	23
John Peter	France	"	France	29
Sullivan King	Rumford, New Hampshire	"	United States	17

I, *Martin Page*

do solemnly, sincerely and truly swear, that the within list contains the names of the  
together with the places of their birth and residence, as far as I can ascertain the same. So HELP

Sworn this

8. day of

1831, before me

*M. D. Danforth, J. C.*

Ship's figurehead at The Whaling Museum, New Bedford, Massachusetts.

whereof is Master

DESCRIPTION OF PERSONS				
No.	Height.		Complexion.	Hair.
	Feet.	Inches.		
5	9	3/4	light	light
5	7		dark	dark
5	8		dark	dark
5	9		light	Brown
5	9		6°	light
5	6		6°	brown
5	9	1/2	dark	dark
5	4	1/2	light	6°
5	4	1/2	6°	light
4	7	1/2	6°	brown
5	5	1/2	6°	light
5	10		6°	6°
5	7	1/2	6°	brown
5	5		speckled	dark
5	4	1/2	light	6°
5	6	1/2	6°	black
5	1	1/4	6°	dark
5	5	1/2	yellow	curled black
5	9	3/4	black	black
4	9	3/4	light	light brown
5	5		6°	brown
5	3	1/2	dark	black
5	3		light	
5			6°	dark
6			dark	
5			6°	
5	6		6°	
5	6		light	brown

of the Ship and Hope.  
 op.

Master Page



Photograph, Charlotte Estey Collection, RIHS Library.