

Rhode Island Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea
State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

Rhode Island State House, Room 217
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903
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Program title: *Treasures from the Archives*
Project lead: Lane Sparkman

Overview: *Treasures from the Archives* is a pop-up exhibition program designed to raise awareness of the Rhode Island State Archives' holdings. The exhibitions take place in the Rhode Island State House Library and feature 1-6 documents from the Archives, along with interpretive panels. The State House receives over 15,000 visitors a year, and the Library is one of its most heavily trafficked rooms.

Subject area: State Heritage

Executive Summary

History

Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea has made improving Rhode Islanders' understanding of and access to their state's rich history a departmental goal. The primary action item within that goal is to provide for an appropriate, permanent home for the State Archives. For over 20 years the Archives has been housed in a leased space that does not meet archival standards or encourage public access. The Department plans to seek public support for this initiative in the coming years, so raising awareness of the existence and needs of the current Archives is critical.

Treasures from the Archives was developed to introduce Rhode Islanders to the Archives' vast holdings and to use these holdings to illustrate significant events in Rhode Island's history.

Significance

Rhode Island's Secretary of State has been the "keeper of records" since the colonial period. Therefore providing an adequate facility to store and make accessible the state's treasure trove of documents is a significant responsibility.

Treasures from the Archives brings together two divisions within the Department of State to support a department-wide goal. By placing interesting, topical archival holdings in a highly visible setting the program has dramatically increased the Archives' visibility.

To date nine exhibitions have taken place featuring 38 documents. Exhibition themes have included: the expansion of suffrage as the result of the Dorr Rebellion, the Electoral College, Rhode Island's role in the American Revolution, and the African American experience in Rhode Island. The exhibitions are kept purposely brief, in order to maintain public interest, and to limit the documents' exposure to light.

Impact

Over the course of 2016 over 15,000 people toured the State House through another program offered by the Department of State. 8,000 of these visitors were school-aged children. All visitors had an opportunity to view one of the *Treasures from the Archives* exhibitions, and several school groups specifically focused on the historical events detailed in the exhibition. In addition to these lay-people, General Assembly members also had multiple opportunities to view archival holdings featured in the exhibition series. As key stakeholders in their state's history and records management, they will be important allies in the work towards creating a permanent, suitable facility for the State Archives.

Secretary of State
Nellie M. Gorbea *presents*

TREASURES From the Archives

"The power of having such a robust State Archives is that it serves as our very own time capsule that we can open at any time to see how the actions by concerned citizenry can not only shape our history, but also relate to current events."

Nellie M. Gorbea
Secretary of State

The items in the case are on loan from the Rhode Island State Archives. A valuable resource for citizens and scholars alike, the Archives houses millions of letters, photographs and important documents dating back to 1638. Together, these holdings help tell the stories of all Rhode Islanders, and offer valuable glimpses into our state's history.

The State Archives is located at 337 Westminister Street and is open to the public weekdays from 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.



Posters from
Treasures
from the
Archives
Exhibitions



The State Archives is a division of the Rhode Island Department of State.

JUNE 2016

Secretary of State
Nellie M. Gorbea *presents*

TREASURES From the Archives

The Gaspee Commission Papers

MARCH 22, 1772

**Letter from Governor Wanton to
Lieutenant Duddington**

HMS Gaspee was sent to patrol Narragansett Bay in 1772. The earliest exchange of letters between her captain and Rhode Island's elected Governor reveal the colonists' frustrations with Gaspee's actions, as well as a dispute regarding whether she had the authority to operate in Narragansett Bay.

"A number of the inhabitants of this Colony have complained to me of your having, in a most illegal and unwarrantable manner, interrupted their trade, by searching and detaining every little packet boat plying between the several towns."

JUNE 12, 1772

Proclamation issued by Governor Wanton

"I have, therefore, thought fit... to issue this Proclamation, strictly charging and commanding all His Majesty's Officers... to exert themselves with the utmost Vigilance, to discover and apprehend the Persons guilty of the aforesaid atrocious Crime."

SEPTEMBER 1772 - JUNE 1773

The Gaspee Commission

George III appointed five officials from different colonies to investigate the incident. The commissioners issued warrants and took depositions from Gaspee crew members, an enslaved boy living on Prudence Island, and others including prominent Providence merchant George Brown.

After a year of investigation, the commissioners reported that due to contradictory evidence and coerced testimony, they were unable to name any of the perpetrators of the crime.

JUNE 9, 1772

Burning of the Gaspee

Hannah, a packet boat captained Benjamin Lindsey, entered Newport, reported her cargo to customs officers, and began sailing north to Providence. Gaspee gave chase and the two ships worked their way up the bay. Eventually, Hannah tacked across shallow water; Gaspee followed and ran aground. Hannah continued on to Providence, leaving Gaspee stranded on Namquit Point.



Later that evening men gathered at Sabin's Tavern in Providence and planned an assault. With enough men to fill several longboats they rowed the six miles back to Gaspee. In the skirmish that followed, Lieutenant Duddington was shot, and the Gaspee crew was bound and removed from their ship. The ship was then set ablaze and burned through the night.

AUGUST 26, 1772

Proclamation issued by King George III

George III offered rewards of up to £1000 to anyone who could supply the names of those responsible for the destruction of the ship, and the injury to its commanding officer.

The burning of the Gaspee has been celebrated in Rhode Island as an important early strike against the tyranny of the crown. However it was the commission's threat to try the accused in England, rather than on native soil by a jury of their peers, that had the most lasting effect. In his autobiography Thomas Jefferson wrote:

"...a court of inquiry held in Rhode Island in 1772, with a power to send persons to England to be tried for offences committed here was considered at our session of the spring of 1773 as demanding attention."

Soon after, understanding that the colonies' many grievances were best addressed with a "unity of action," a meeting of deputies from every colony was proposed. These deputies became the First Continental Congress.



The State Archives is a division of the Rhode Island Department of State.

Installation photo in a tweet



Nellie M. Gorbea @RISecState · Jan 4

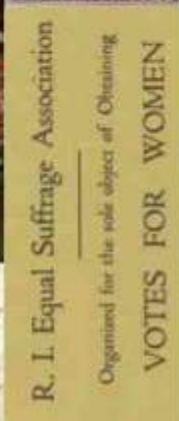
Answer: The Butts Hill Fort in **#PortsmouthRI**. Visit **#TreasuresFromTheArchives** at the State House Library to see these plans & more today!



DISCOVER

The RI State Archives

The Archives is home to millions of letters, photographs, and important state documents that form a permanent, tangible record of Rhode Island's rich history. Holdings date back to 1638 and include Rhode Island's copies of the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights, as well as original letters from Presidents, including George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.



Take-away rack cards with additional information about the Archives holdings, relevance and location are attached to exhibition posters.

The State Archives and Historical Records Act created the State Archives as the "official custodian and trustee for the state of all public records of permanent historical, legal or other value."

OUR SERVICES:

A free exhibition program offers the public the opportunity to see historic photographs and one-of-a-kind documents first hand, or online.

Archives staff provides assistance to researchers at the facility, as well as by mail, phone, and email.

An online catalog to the collections is available, including histories of state agencies, descriptions of their records in the holdings, indexes, and selected images.



HOURS:

Monday - Friday
8:30 am - 4:30 pm

CONTACT US:

☎ 401-222-2353

✉ statearchives@sos.ri.gov

LOCATION:

**Rhode Island
State Archives**
337 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903

💻 www.sos.ri.gov

🐦 @RISecState

PARKING:

Free validated parking is available at InTown Parking, located directly across Snow Street.

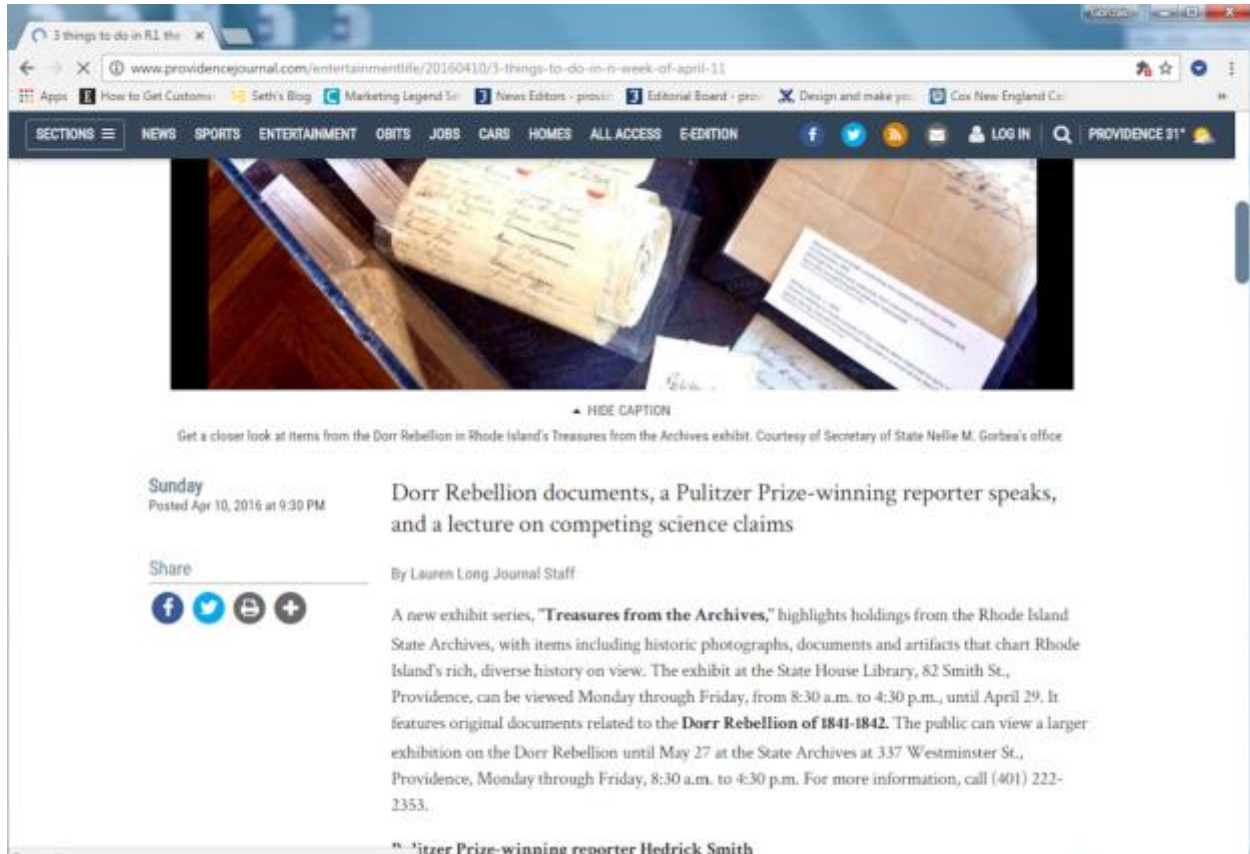


Nellie M. Gorbea
Secretary of State

The State Archives is a division of the
Rhode Island Department of State.

Samples of media coverage

Providence Journal, April 10, 2016



The screenshot shows a web browser displaying an article on the Providence Journal website. The browser's address bar shows the URL: www.providencejournal.com/entertainmentlife/20160410/3-things-to-do-in-n-week-of-april-11. The website's navigation bar includes sections like NEWS, SPORTS, ENTERTAINMENT, and a search bar. The main image is a photograph of historical documents and artifacts, with a caption below it that reads: "Get a closer look at items from the Dorr Rebellion in Rhode Island's Treasures from the Archives exhibit. Courtesy of Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea's office". The article's title is "Dorr Rebellion documents, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter speaks, and a lecture on competing science claims", and it is by Lauren Long, Journal Staff. The article text describes a new exhibit series, "Treasures from the Archives," highlighting holdings from the Rhode Island State Archives, including historic photographs, documents, and artifacts that chart Rhode Island's rich, diverse history. The exhibit is at the State House Library, 82 Smith St., Providence, and can be viewed Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., until April 29. It features original documents related to the Dorr Rebellion of 1841-1842. The public can view a larger exhibition on the Dorr Rebellion until May 27 at the State Archives at 337 Westminster St., Providence, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information, call (401) 222-2353. The article is dated Sunday, April 10, 2016 at 9:30 PM, and includes social media sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Print.

3 things to do in R.I. this week

www.providencejournal.com/entertainmentlife/20160410/3-things-to-do-in-n-week-of-april-11

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▲ HIDE CAPTION

Get a closer look at items from the Dorr Rebellion in Rhode Island's Treasures from the Archives exhibit. Courtesy of Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea's office

Sunday
Posted Apr 10, 2016 at 9:30 PM

Share

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Dorr Rebellion documents, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter speaks, and a lecture on competing science claims

By Lauren Long Journal Staff

A new exhibit series, "**Treasures from the Archives**," highlights holdings from the Rhode Island State Archives, with items including historic photographs, documents and artifacts that chart Rhode Island's rich, diverse history on view. The exhibit at the State House Library, 82 Smith St., Providence, can be viewed Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., until April 29. It features original documents related to the **Dorr Rebellion of 1841-1842**. The public can view a larger exhibition on the Dorr Rebellion until May 27 at the State Archives at 337 Westminster St., Providence, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information, call (401) 222-2353.

Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Hedrick Smith

RI Public Radio, June 3, 2016

18. Secretary of State **Nellie Gorbea**'s "Treasures from the Archives" series is turning its attention to the 1772 burning of the British schooner *Gaspee*, with a display in the Statehouse library. According to a news release, "On June 9, 1772, the packet sloop *Hannah* ran the *Gaspee* aground in the shallow waters of Namquid Point. That night, in what would become a significant precursor to the American Revolution, angry colonists carried out a plan to burn and destroy the *Gaspee*. Despite British attempts to investigate and arrest the perpetrators after the burning, not one member of the rebellious group was detained. Rhode Islanders commemorate this historic act of civil defiance each year with a series of community events called the Gaspee Days. 'The June *Treasures* exhibition of the *Gaspee Commission Papers* is a perfect example of how our State Archives serves as our very own time capsule that we can open at any time to see how the actions by concerned citizenry have shaped our history,' Gorbea said. 'It also provides an additional element of historical context to one of Rhode Island's longstanding community traditions.' "