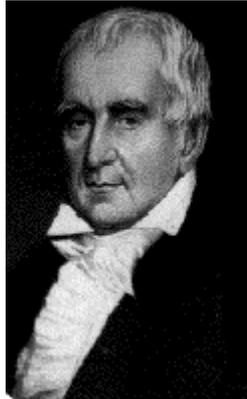


NICHOLAS BROWN, JR. OF PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND



1655

[Nicholas Brown](#) of [Portsmouth, Rhode Island](#) took the oath of a freeman.

1720

[James Brown](#) and [Nicholas Brown](#) (grandfather of the [Nicholas Brown, Jr.](#) who would give the family name to the [College of Rhode Island](#), making it into [Brown University](#)) began to establish, centered in [Rhode Island](#), one of the foremost business families in the colonies. They not only traded, they sponsored local businesses which would provide them with materials for trade. For instance, in order to deal in the [triangular trade](#), needing rum to ship to the coast of Africa, they encouraged local distilleries.¹

1722

December 21: Captain [James Brown](#) and Hope Power, the daughter of Nicholas and Mercy Tillinghast Power, were wed in [Providence, Rhode Island](#). The couple would have a number of sons who would become famous wealthy merchants in Providence, and founders and patrons of [Brown University](#):

1. The Providence Browns, not counting a fifth brother who had died young: brothers [Nicholas Brown](#) (1729-1791), Joseph (1733-1785), John (1736-1803), and [Moses Brown](#) (1738-1836), uncles Obadiah (1712-1762) and Elisha (1717-1802).



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- On February 12, 1724,  a son named [James Brown](#) who would not marry and who would die at York, Virginia on February 15, 1750
- On July 28, 1729,  a son named [Nicholas Brown](#), who would marry a first wife Rhoda Jenks on May 2, 1762 and then a second wife Avis Binney on September 9, 1785, who would have a son [Nicholas Brown, Jr.](#) who would be a benefactor of [Brown University](#) and a famous wealthy merchant in [Providence](#), and who would die in 1791
- In 1731, a daughter named Mary Brown who would marry a John Vanderlight
- On December 3, 1733,  a son named Joseph Brown who would marry Elizabeth Power on September 30, 1759, who was a patriot in the Revolution and served in both [Providence](#) town and Rhode Island state offices, and would die on December 3, 1785
- On January 27, 1736,  a son named [John Brown](#), who would marry Sarah Smith on November 27, 1760, who would be a famous wealthy merchant and [slavetrader](#) in [Providence](#), and benefactor of [Brown University](#), and would die in 1803
- On September 12, 1738,  a son named [Moses Brown](#) (who would marry a first time on January 1, 1764 to his first cousin Anna Brown and then, after Anna's death in about 1773, a second time on March 4, 1779 to Friend Mary Olney, and then a third time on May 2, 1799 to Phebe Lockwood), who would be a famous wealthy merchant in [Providence](#) and a benefactor of the Rhode Island Friends Quarterly Meeting School (now for some reason known as the [Moses Brown School](#)), and would die in 1836.²

Here is what has been said of the influence of this Friend, in Hugh Barbour's and J. William Frost's THE QUAKERS (NY: Greenwood Press, 1988, pages 298-9):

[Moses Brown](#), born into a prominent prosperous [Baptist](#) family, served an apprenticeship with his uncle Obadiah Brown in order to learn mercantile practices. Later he joined with his three elder brothers in Nicholas Brown and Co., a firm engaged in iron manufacture, the West Indies trade, the manufacture and sale of spermacetti candles, and -on one occasion- the slave trade. Moses, who married his first cousin Anna, daughter of Obadiah Brown, became wealthy. In the 1760s he became active in civic improvements, politics, agricultural reform, and education - notably the creation of the College of Rhode Island [[Brown University](#)]. The death of Anna in 1773 caused Moses Brown to reconsider his priorities. He attempted (unsuccessfully) to withdraw from business, traveled with itinerant Quaker ministers in New England, freed his own [slaves](#), and became an ardent abolitionist and defender of free blacks. In 1774 he requested membership in the [Smithfield](#) Monthly Meeting. He soon became a leader of the [Rhode Island Friends](#), serving as elder from 1783 to 1836 and treasurer of the Meeting for Sufferings after 1776.

Before the Revolution, Brown attempted to broaden the antislavery campaign beyond Friends. In 1776 he organized a Quaker relief effort to help those New Englanders suffering the effects of the British blockade. He opposed independence and sought for a neutral course during the war. He had misgivings about the official Quaker stance of not using paper money and not paying mixed taxes. Concerned with what he saw as a lack of educational opportunity for Friends, Brown helped organize a [Yearly Meeting](#) school that lasted from 1784 to 1788; twenty years later in [Providence](#) he revived this boarding

2. This Moses (1738-1836) is not to be confused with Moses (1793-1879) or Moses (1829-1883), nor for that matter is he to be confused with a non-Quaker Moses Brown who was a merchant in Newburyport, Massachusetts.

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school, which today is called the [Moses Brown School](#). Brown's charitable and humanistic activities continued after the peace. He led the effort of Friends and other Rhode Islanders to end the slave trade and abolish slavery. Brown worked with non-Quakers in supporting the College of Rhode Island, the American Bible Society, and the Rhode Island Peace Society. Although his lack of formal education left him reticent about publishing, he read widely and corresponded on medical and scientific subjects. Seeing the distress in [Rhode Island](#) after the Revolution, Brown sought to increase economic opportunity by helping to found and serve as a director of the first bank in Rhode Island. His initial qualms about the United States [Constitution](#) were overcome by the Bill of Rights, and he mobilized Quakers to support Rhode Island's ratification. He became an expert on cloth manufacture and sponsored [Samuel Slater](#)'s activities in developing the American textile industry.





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1765

August 28: During the [Middle Passage](#) of the [Sally](#) from the Guinea coast of Africa toward the slave plantations of the West Indies, Captain [Esek Hopkins](#) of [Rhode Island](#) had encountered a considerable amount of illness and disability among the white seamen of his crew. Also, three more members of the cargo had succumbed. He had therefore pressed four of the seemingly compliant male blacks of the cargo into service abovedecks, and they had seemed to be making themselves helpful with the sails. In the language of the time “he was obliged to permit some of the slaves to come on deck to assist the people.” However, these four men had been merely biding their time, and on this day attempted to set free the other surviving blacks of the cargo. To reassert control the crew needed to fire upon their assets, killing eight outright and wounding a number of others, two of whom would also eventually die during the remainder of the voyage. In addition, some of the blacks leaped overboard in the midst of the ocean and, their heads bobbing in the swell, could not be retrieved. The venture’s opportunities to offer profit to the [Providence](#) firm of [Nicholas Brown](#) and Company were beginning to seem rather marginal.³

TRIANGULAR TRADE

During the remainder of the voyage, some additional members of the cargo would perish through refusal to accept nourishment.

3. At the end of the voyage, only 108 of the original 196 would be deliverable to their new slave lives in America. The slaves had been acquired along the coast of Africa for about £5-£10 each or a total of about £1,500 and the survivors were disposed of for about £20 each or a total of about £2,000, a gross profit of about £500, but from such a gross figure must be subtracted all the considerable expenses of the voyage and of crew salaries and of not being able to use the ship for any other purpose for a year. All told, the Browns of [Providence](#) would lose £9,000-£10,000 during this particular sailing venture. [Moses Brown](#) would later point out that overall, their firm’s slave trade with the [Mary](#), the [Wheel of Fortune](#), and the [Sally](#) had resulted in loss rather than in the adding to of the Brown family assets, despite the fact that of the brothers, [John Brown](#) individually would see fit to continue in this trade.

We need not mention how Disagreeable the Nuse of your Luseing 88 slaves is to us & all your Friends, but your Self Continuing in Helth is so Grate Satisfaction to us that we Remain Cheirful under the Heavy Loss of our Ints.



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1770

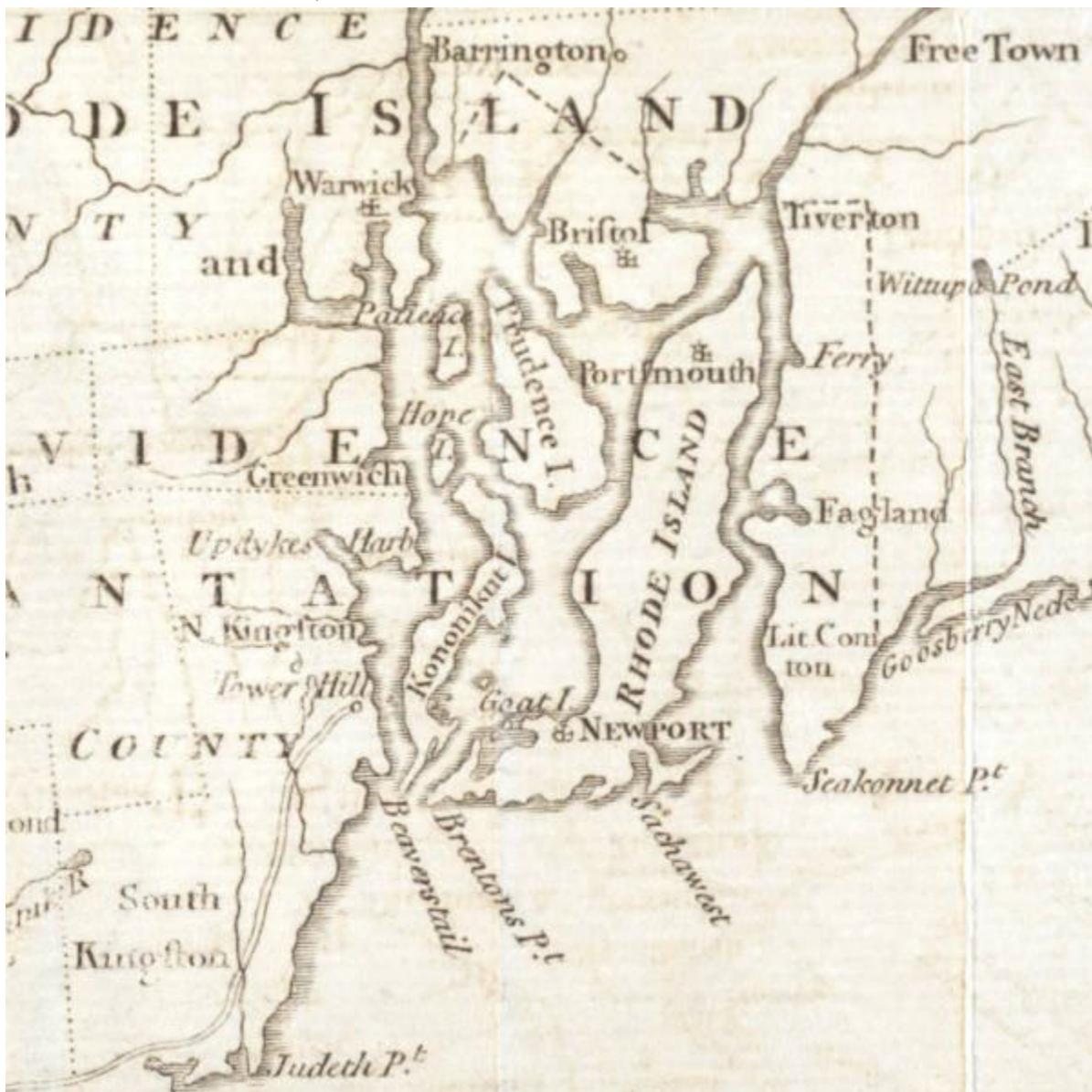
February: The town and county of Warren having subscribed a total of £4,200 toward the erection of a college building, the [Rhode Island](#) College Corporation settled on [Providence](#), rather than upon [Warren](#) or [Newport](#), as the permanent home of their [Baptist](#) institution of higher education, and during the course of this year the building now known as University Hall would be erected by the contractor, [Nicholas Brown](#) & Company, in part by the use of slave labor. The pastor of the First Baptist Church of Providence desired to retire from the duties of his office, and that church invited President Manning to preach provisionally for them. Therefore the Reverend [James Manning](#) relocated from Warren to preach provisionally at Providence's 1st [Baptist](#) Church as well as



to continue to lead his Latin School. (During this year the Reverend was [manumitting](#) his only black [slave](#). His Warren Latin School, which would soon eventuate as the Providence “University Grammar-School,” and is now known as [Brown University](#), now admits black Americans as students: as I write this, a case is pending in regard to three white male students, accused of manhandling a black female student in front of a dorm while informing her that “You’re just a quota.” The black female student had, it would appear, attracted their ire because allegedly she had neglected to hold the door open for another student who was entering the dorm — these three white male students having decided, it would seem, upon an “open door” policy all of their own.)

1774

The colony of [Rhode Island](#) at this point had 59,707 (57,707?) residents residing in 29 incorporated municipalities. Sixteen of the native Americans still alive were in [Bristol](#) (by 1785, this group would have dwindled to two survivors).



The census showed that, in [Providence](#), there were 4,321 persons divided into 655 families living in 421 dwellings.



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Of the Brown brothers, only [Friend Moses Brown](#) had divested himself of his slaves. [John Brown](#) owned two, [Nicholas Brown](#) owned two, and Joseph Brown owned four. In their circle of friends and associates, [Stephen Hopkins](#) owned six (the present Quaker conceit that we had been forced to disown Governor Hopkins for merely refusing to free but one slave, who was perhaps a woman in a special situation, clearly per this census data amounts to no more than that, a present Quaker conceit), [Esek Hopkins](#) owned four, Daniel Jenckes owned four, Jabez Bowen owned one (Prince, who would in 1784 cut a deal for his achieving his freedom as of 1787), and the editor of the Providence [Gazette](#), John Carter, owned one or more.

THE BROWN BROTHERS

During this year Mrs. Ann Smith Hopkins, the Quaker wife of the [Rhode Island](#) Governor Stephen Hopkins who had in the previous year been disowned by the Religious Society of Friends, herself a “birthright Friend,” applied to her Quaker fellows for a routine letter of introduction to be used during her travels in Pennsylvania—a letter stating her to be in good standing in her home worship group—and the Quaker monthly meeting in [Smithfield](#), after duly considering her request, declined to provide this First Lady of Rhode Island with any such routine endorsement.

Fall: The enslaved man Tom, along with his wife and their four young children, had been freed in May by order of the [Providence, Rhode Island](#) town meeting after their [slaveholder](#) owner, Jacob Schoemaker, had died there intestate. However, it came to appear that that town action had been premature: creditors from the island of Antigua in the Caribbean claimed this family as part of the Schoemaker estate there. If they had belonged to the estate rather than to the town of Providence, they could not be set free by the town, and still were slaves, and pertained to new white inheritors. The creditors wanted this New England town to return their property. Papers were served upon [John Brown](#) who left it to his brother [Nicholas Brown](#) to handle the matter. Nicholas consulted with brother [Moses Brown](#) and composed a letter of response.

THE BROWN BROTHERS

What these inheritors in Antigua were told was that “there is no getting possession of them without an expensive suit” which, at least in the case of the four minor children, would be unlikely to succeed before a New England jury. Nicholas intimated that his brother Moses had “told me lately, he would be at the expense of a lawsuit himself before they should be carried away to the West Indies as slaves.” He added (how truly or falsely not now known) “Brother John Brown much of the same way of thinking.”

FREE PAPERS

September 4: At the age of 19, [Elkanah Watson](#) was entrusted to carry more than \$50,000 to [John Brown](#) and [Nicholas Brown](#) of [Providence, Rhode Island](#)’s agents in South Carolina and Georgia. With the money sewed into the linings of his garments, he would accomplish the journey of some 1,200 miles from Providence to Charleston in 70 days (along the way passing through Edenton, [North Carolina](#) on the Albemarle Sound near the Great Dismal Swamp, as well as through the state capital of New Bern).⁴

4. \$50,000 then would be roughly equivalent to \$5,000,000 now. I would therefore presume that the funds were not in cash, but were instead in the form of large-denomination banknotes or letters of credit that would be rather difficult for a robber to benefit from.



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November 13, Thursday: [Elkanah Watson](#) arrived in Charleston, South Carolina and delivered the funds of [John Brown](#) and [Nicholas Brown](#) of [Providence, Rhode Island](#) to their agent. Then he, with two companions, set out on a tour of exploration of other southern states (they would be dissuaded from entering Florida, which was still under British control).

October: Visiting Paris, the [Reverend Joseph Priestley](#) met with Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier in his home to inform him of his experiments with dephlogisticated and phlogisticated air (Lavoisier would repeat the experiment and confirm these findings).

The Provincial Congress, held in [Concord](#), had as two of its members Colonel [Francis Faulkner](#) and Ephraim Hapsgood representing nearby Acton.

In the colony of Connecticut, any further importation of Indian, Negro, or Molatto [*sic*] Slaves was prohibited. They were not to be brought in by sea. They were not to be brought in by land. They were not to be brought from any place or places whatever. They were not to be disposed of in Connecticut. They were not to be left in Connecticut. Did we mention that they were not to be sold within Connecticut? No. No. Definitely not. They could of course continue to be passed from white hand to white hand for good and valuable consideration, within Connecticut. Of course.

"... no indian, negro or molatto Slave shall at any time hereafter be brought or imported into this Colony, by sea or land, from any place or places whatsoever, to be disposed of, left or sold within this Colony." This was re-enacted in the revision of 1784, and slaves born after 1784 were ordered to be emancipated at the age of twenty-five. COLONIAL RECORDS, XIV. 329; ACTS AND LAWS OF CONNECTICUT (ed. 1784), pp. 233-4.

[INTERNATIONAL SLAVE TRADE](#)

In [Providence, Rhode Island](#), [Nicholas Brown](#) needed to pay for a shipment of pearl ash. He therefore sent off "a Negro boy," in partial payment, to the Massachusetts enterprise to which he owned this business debt.

[SLAVERY](#)

1783

January 18, day: The 5th of [Thomas Paine](#)'s "Six Letters to [Rhode Island](#)," arguing the necessity of funding for the new federal government of the United States of America, appeared in the [Providence Gazette](#). By this point Paine had been in Providence long enough to begin to suspect the motivation of his opponents (whom he did not name), and wrote about this suspect motivation, accusing them of self-interest and a lack of patriotism. The persons he was attacking included [John Brown](#) and [Nicholas Brown](#) and they of course knew it:

The objectors to the measure, not choosing to begin the question where it ought to be begun, have formed into an ambushade to attack it in disguise ... this ambushade consists originally of



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about ten or a dozen merchants, who have self-interest in the matter, and who, with a very profitable trade pay very little taxes in proportion ... and who likewise, by their present opposition, are drawing themselves away from the common burdens of the country, and throwing themselves upon the shoulders of others. And this, forsooth, they call patriotism.... Be ashamed, gentlemen, to put off the payment of your just debts, the payment of your suffering army, and the support of your national honor, upon such illiberal and unbelieved pretenses.

THE BROWN BROTHERS

October 1: This being the year in which [Moses Brown](#), a brother to the wealthy [Providence](#) businessmen [Nicholas Brown](#) and [John Brown](#) who engaged in the [international slave trade](#) but a convert to [Quakerism](#), was becoming an elder in his monthly meeting of the [Religious Society of Friends](#) and beginning his campaign to end [Rhode Island](#)'s involvement in human slavery,⁵ one might be tempted to leap to the presumption that such



a campaign must obviously have been a righteous Quakerly protest against lay racism, motivated by religious egalitarianism — but before we leap to such a conclusion we must consider something which happened on this particular day of the year: In the case of Abigail Franks, the young woman of mixed race who had applied for membership in the [Religious Society of Friends](#), the [Yearly Meeting](#) decided that:

The request of Chester Quarter last year respecting the application of a woman to Concord Monthly Meeting to be received into membership, and which was referred for further consideration to this or a future meeting being now revived, the subject opening with weight, it is the sense and judgment of the meeting that Concord Monthly Meeting may safely consider the application of the person on the same ground in common with other applications for admission into membership.

Although these minutes testify only to “weighty and edifying deliberations and a spirit of condescension,” “a weighty exercise,” and “diverse just observations,” mentioning no doubt or objection, it is clear that there had been such — because there is on record a personal letter from a friend of the applicant who afterward commented “the mountains of opposition are leveled before her.”⁶

No way was this going to be easy! There was still a great spirit of racism to be overcome!

5. There were five slaves in the Brown family mansion on College Hill in [Providence](#), and [Moses Brown](#) helped them work up the courage to steal themselves away.

6. The data elements for this series on the acceptability of persons of mixed race as Quakers are from Henry Cadbury's “Negro Membership in the Society of Friends” in [The Journal of Negro History](#), Volume 21 (1936), pages 151-213. 



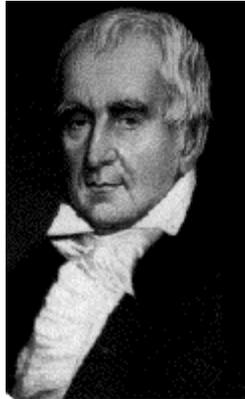
NICHOLAS BROWN, JR.

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1786

[Nicholas Brown, Jr.](#) graduated from the [College of Rhode Island](#), which was then being held in a brick schoolhouse toward the bottom of Meeting Street in [Providence, Rhode Island](#) near the Friends meetinghouse. (Eventually, of course, this college would be renamed in his honor.)

BROWN UNIVERSITY





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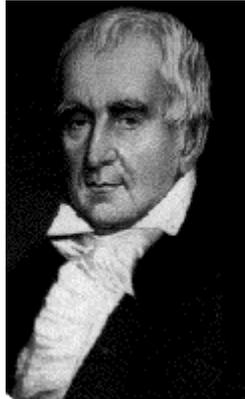
1791

Arthur Fenner was re-elected as Governor of [Rhode Island](#).

READ EDWARD FIELD TEXT

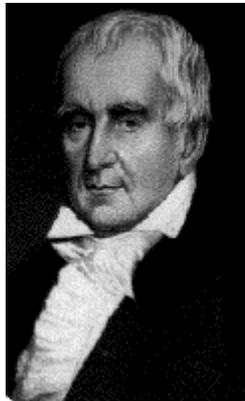
[Nicholas Brown, Jr.](#) became a trustee of the [College of Rhode Island](#) in [Providence](#) from which he had graduated five years earlier, the institution which eventually would come to bear his name.

BROWN UNIVERSITY

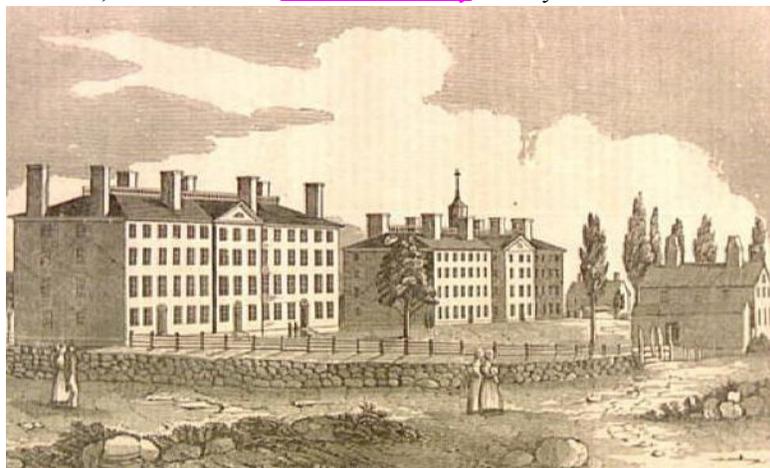


1804

September: The College Corporation in Providence, Rhode Island had been advertising for some time that “any person giving to this Corporation the sum of Six thousand dollars, or good security therefore, before the next annual Commencement, shall have the honour of naming this University” — but there had been not a nibble. It was determined therefore that, since a chair in oratory had recently been endowed in the amount of \$5,000 by alumnus Nicholas Brown, Jr., the College of Rhode Island was henceforth to be known as



“Brown University in Providence in the State of Rhode Island, and Providence Plantations.” On the existing printed forms, such as receipts for student room rent, the words “R. Island College” were to be stricken out in pen with a double line, and the words “Brown University” neatly written in above.



There’s a story floating around, that Brown University is called Brown University because the Brown family donated the money to build the first of the dedicated college edifices. That this story is utterly false may be seen from the fact that by the point at which Nicholas Brown, Jr. gave the money to found a chair of oratory, that first dedicated college edifice had already been constructed — and had already been in use for more than a full generation of human life.



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I found this on page 6 of a book by David Hinshaw titled HERBERT HOOVER: AMERICAN QUAKER, a book that is rather problematically titled since President Herbert Hoover, although his deceased mother had been a registered Quaker minister, was definitely not himself a [Quaker](#) — was arguably himself not even a religious man.⁷

A marked Quaker characteristic is an interest in education. This has been made manifest in many ways. Ezra Cornell, the founder of the university that bears his name, was a Quaker. So was Johns Hopkins, and the Brown family of Providence, founders, respectively, of the universities which bear their names.

I don't know whether **anything** in the above snippet from the book by David Hinshaw is accurate,⁸ but for certain sure, no member of the Brown family of [Providence, Rhode Island](#) associated with [Brown University](#), which had begun as a [Baptist](#) college called Rhode Island College, was ever a [Quaker](#). One of the famous Brown brothers, [Moses Brown](#), did become a convinced Friend, but the benevolent activities of Moses were more associated with the Friends [Yearly Meeting](#) School of [Portsmouth](#), later to be renamed Moses Brown School (after his demise), rather than being associated in any way, shape, or manner with this Rhode Island College that was becoming [Brown University](#). The members of the Brown family who (in addition to their general philanthropic activities such as providing basic free transportation for people of color, from the coast of Africa to the ports of the New World) were associating with this Rhode Island College — such as the [Nicholas Brown](#) who donated \$5,000 and (surprise!) got the college renamed in his honor as [Brown University](#) — were

7. [Bert Hoover](#) did read the entire Bible prior to age 10, and would “affirm” rather than “swear” when he took the oath of office as President. He was, however, among other things, a racist who worried about the “Yellow Tide,” as well as being a man who didn't pay his bar bills unless and until he absolutely had to. All politicians knowing how essential it is to posture religiously, a special Friends Meeting House had to be set up in Washington DC for him — a meeting which in fact had no affiliation whatever with any other Quaker group — and as President he did occasionally attend there for a photo opportunity. Hoover was, however, not particularly impressed with the Quaker peace testimony and eventually came to regard the Cold War between the US and the USSR as a religious struggle. In 1950 he would call on the God-fearing nations of the world to unite “against the tide of Red agnosticism ... against the hideous ideas of the police state and human slavery.” He would never subject himself to a clearness committee, and he would never join, even at this Washington meeting which had been set up especially for his photo opportunities, a self-originating group which in fact lacked any affiliation to any other Friends anywhere.

THE QUAKER PEACE TESTIMONY

8. Ezra Cornell did in fact in his late adulthood contribute to the endowment of Cornell University, and he had in fact started out as a birthright [Quaker](#), but in his youth he had forsaken the [Religious Society of Friends](#) in order to marry with an Episcopalian girl — and it is clear that he never looked back. To say that he “was” a Quaker when he founded Cornell University, therefore, may in the most strict sense not be uttering a falsehood, but this would be to rely upon a Bill-Clintonian escape clause such as “It all depends upon what ‘was’ means.”



It all depends...



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from start to finish decidedly non-Quakerly. They were, indeed, regular Baptists, and descendants of the Reverend Chad Brown who came in at the 1st [Baptist](#) Church of Providence after the Reverend Roger Williams had decided not to participate, and of his grandson, the Reverend James Brown, also a pastor of that church.⁹



Sorry, but this is not Quaker costume.

One of the problems of the historical profession is scholars like this David Hinshaw, who in a search for greater and greater fulsomeness simply make stuff up out of whole cloth, and, because their stuff is magnificently fulsome, of course are able to find publishers, and, because their stuff is magnificently fulsome, are of course able to find readers. (Let's share this around: the publishers who are so greedy that they are willing to publish such crap are also to blame, and the readers who are so gullible that they are able to swallow such crap are also to blame.)

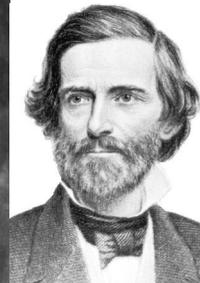
1809

 [Nicholas Brown, Jr.](#) established the largest [cotton](#) manufactory in the USA, on the [Blackstone River](#).

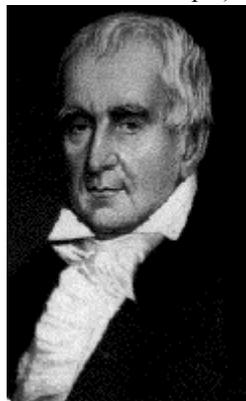
9. Visiting the Brown Mansion in Providence, I was shown a portrait of Mrs. Brown, attired in what was described as a cashmere shawl, and informed that although her husband was Baptist, she was a Quaker. I have not checked into this allegation, but I can assure you that it was a literal impossibility that in New England during the late 18th Century and the early 19th Century, a Quaker and a Baptist could be a married couple. Marrying outside the group meant immediate disownment. This was not merely a general rule, as I am aware of no single exception to it. Mrs. Brown simply could not have been married to Mr. Brown, and been a Quaker. No matter how wealthy the family, nothing remotely like this was ever tolerated.

1821

➡ The war for liberation of Greece from the Ottoman Empire began. This would last into 1829. In [Rhode Island](#), William C. Gibbs was in charge. [Samuel Gridley Howe](#), who like Byron would take an active part in the Greek war against Turkey, graduated from [Brown University](#) in [Providence](#).



During his undergraduate education, he had been notorious for his pranks, such as leading the college president's horse up the stairs to the top floor of the College Edifice. (Speaking of the College Edifice, in this year the lot adjacent to it was being purchased upon which a 3-story brick building would be constructed by [Nicholas Brown, Jr.](#) and named in honor of his sister Hope.)



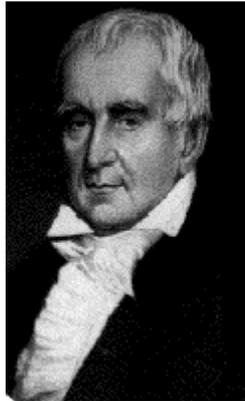


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1839

At [Brown University](#) in [Providence, Rhode Island](#), [Nicholas Brown, Jr.](#) provided land and most of the funding for a new house of the sciences, to be known as Rhode Island Hall.



1839. The Public Schools of this city were re-organized under a new system; the number of schools was increased, and several new, elegant and spacious school-houses were erected.

1841

[Nicholas Brown, Jr.](#), the head of [Providence, Rhode Island](#)'s major firm Brown and Ives who had over a lifetime donated \$160,000 to his alma mater, died. Eventually Rhode Island College would be renamed in honor of this alumnus.

[BROWN UNIVERSITY](#)

2002

March 31: A reparations lawsuit was filed, to obtain compensation for human slavery on behalf of the descendants of American slaves, from the inheritors of American corporations that historically had profited from the uncompensated labors of slaves or from the slave trade's dealings in human beings:

March 31, 2002
Lawsuit maintains slavery extended past plantations
Action on behalf of descendants claims companies profited unfairly
By JEFF DONN



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Associated Press

BOSTON – Imagine slavery, and you’ll likely picture black workers stooped over rows of cotton in the South.

Yet lawyers who recently filed a federal lawsuit seeking corporate reparations for slavery named three companies far removed from farming, two of them based in New England.

The lawyers, suing on behalf of millions of slave descendants, may eventually name more than 1,000 companies.

But the initial defendants are FleetBoston Financial Corp., of Boston; insurer Aetna, of Hartford, Conn., and railway operator CSX Corp., of Richmond, Va.

How can this be?

Historians say the lawsuit, whatever its merits, serves as a reminder that slavery also extended into the Northern economy and, in the Old South, touched many industries beyond the plantations.

Lawyers for slave descendants picked FleetBoston because [Rhode Island](#) slave trader [John Brown](#) was a founder of its 18th century predecessor, [Providence](#) Bank.

The bank financed Brown’s slave voyages and profited from them, the lawsuit says.

Brown was born in 1736 into an influential merchant family with holdings that would eventually extend into salt, meat, lumber, bricks, iron and even chocolate.

He helped charter what became [Brown University](#) (though it is named for his nephew, [Nicholas Brown, Jr.](#)).

John Brown owned or co-owned at least six ships with inspirational names like the Hope and the Providence, according to Rachel Chernos Lin, a Brown University graduate student researching the history of the area’s slave trade.

Brown’s boats would load up with local rum, sell it in West Africa, pick up slaves, sell them in the Caribbean or the South, and often fill up with sugar or molasses for the journey home. They would carry 200 slaves or more on a trip.

Other local merchants did the same sort of trade, but it didn’t always go unchallenged. Brown’s own brother, [Moses Brown](#), was an ardent abolitionist.

He helped the Abolition Society successfully sue his brother under the U.S. Slave Trade Act of 1794, an early anti-slavery law that banned outfitting ships to carry slaves.

John Brown had to forfeit the Hope, according to Jay Coughtry, a historian at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

From 1709 to 1807, Rhode Island merchants invested in more than 930 slaving trips to Africa, Coughtry estimates. They wrested more than 105,000 Africans from their homeland.

Brown eventually dropped that kind of business – “not because it was immoral, but because it wasn’t profitable,” says Norman Fiering, a library administrator at Brown University.

FleetBoston has declined comment.

CSX wants the lawsuit thrown out. In a statement, the rail line said the impacts of slavery “cannot be attributed to any single company or industry.”



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Railway historians say slaves virtually built the rail network of the South from the 1830s to the 1850s.

Of nearly 120 railroads, at least 90 –and probably more– used slave labor for construction, maintenance or other jobs, says historian Ted Kornweibel at San Diego State University.

In the peak years before the Civil War, he says, about 15,000 slaves labored annually for Southern railroads.

The companies that eventually folded into CSX are no exception. At least 37 of them used slave labor, Kornweibel says, based on his research. Sometimes they owned the slaves; sometimes they rented them from seasonal surpluses at plantations.

A contract signed Feb. 12, 1862, is typical. P.V. Daniel Jr., president of CSX's Virginia predecessor, the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac railroad, promised to pay \$160 to Mrs. B.B. Wright.

Her two rented slaves were identified only as John Henry and Reuben. They were to be returned clothed as when they arrived. Some years, individual slaves, often worth more than \$1,000 in a sale, cost up to \$200 to rent for a season.

Some railroad contracts of that era specified that they must be properly fed. If a rented slave ran away, the owner often paid for lost job time.

Slaves remained valuable economic commodities into the Civil War years. Insurers, including Aetna, began selling a new product, life insurance, to compensate owners for the loss of slaves.

In its response to the reparations lawsuit, Aetna said the "events –however regrettable– occurred hundreds of years ago" and "in no way reflect Aetna today."

Still, the company, founded in 1853, has acknowledged that it holds records of five Aetna life insurance policies on slaves and knows of at least two others. Together, they insured the lives of 16 slaves in Virginia and South Carolina. In one policy, a slave was identified simply as "James, 23, a blacksmith."

The slave owners who took out the policies agreed to pay \$5 to \$10 for a term of one-to-three months, perhaps to insure against loss during a planting season. "From their perspective at the time, they really needed that labor," says Aetna spokesman Fred Laberge.

Plantation owners mostly sought out such policies, beginning the business with other insurance companies in the 1840s. Sometimes railroads, canal builders, and others with dangerous work also insured the lives of slaves.

"Slaves were involved in almost all aspects of Southern industries," said historian Charles Dew, at Williams College, in Williamstown, Mass.

As with some policies today, the insured person had to be healthy. Slaves were rejected for coverage for such reasons as a hernia or simply being "unsound," according to Todd Savitt, a historian at East Carolina University, in Greenville, N.C.

In a review of 1,693 life policies for slaves in 1856, Savitt calculated the average payout on death at \$665. The average payout on 500 policies insuring whites during the same period



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was \$3,500.



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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



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ARRGH AUTOMATED RESEARCH REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE



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